

The Walk to Emmaus – Luke 24:13-35

The Walk to Emmaus is a well-known story. It is one of the great stories of the New Testament as it tells us of the staggering transformation that occurred in the disciple's journey on the road. Yet it is only reported in the Gospel of Luke, not the other Gospels.

The village of Emmaus was about 7 miles or 11 kilometres from Jerusalem. And we are told of two previously unnamed followers of Jesus – one named Cleopas but we are not told the name of the other.

As they had been walking a little while, another person began walking beside them. As far as they knew He was just another traveler.

At the start these two disciples were weary feeling that all of their hopes for the future had been dashed. They were experiencing disappointment, doubt, confusion and hopelessness.

This story could very well be our own story of when we lose hope and the desire to move on because our dreams have been crushed. This story highlights the living hope that we have in the Resurrection of Jesus.

But these two had left the demoralized and confused group of disciples with the events of Good Friday fresh in their memories. We can understand their confusion, can't we? The Master they had loved and followed had been horribly put to death on a Roman cross. Death by crucifixion was the most shameful of deaths; the victim was made a public spectacle, exposed to the jeers of all that passed by.

Only a week before, on Palm Sunday, the hopes of the disciples had risen to fever pitch when the excited crowds had hailed their Master as the longed-for deliverer from the tyranny of Roman occupation, but now He lay dead in a sealed tomb!

Their hopes were dashed. The followers of Jesus were without a leader and they were falling apart quickly. These two were already on their way home. What else was there left to do? Life goes on...Life must go on...

The reports that Christ's tomb was empty had only confused the disciples more. Their entire world had come apart. The two downhearted disciples summed up the situation when they said ***"We had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel."***

These same words are included in Luke 2:25. We read that when Jesus was just 8 days old and presented in the temple, they were met by an aged Simeon who had been waiting for the consolation of Israel – the arrival of the Messiah and when he finally meets and recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, he delivers a message of hope and sorrow to Mary and Joseph.

But these disciples clearly did not believe Jesus had risen from the dead. The empty tomb and the report of the angel's announcement were not enough to convince them.

Human hope is a fragile thing, and when it withers it's difficult to revive. Have you ever experienced such total hopelessness? There seems like no way out, no matter what you have tried you just couldn't change the situation.

I often see that look of total helplessness in the eyes of people who have given up. Whether it is a serious medical diagnosis; a relationship breakdown; a job you dislike but can't leave due to financial reasons; giving up cigarettes, alcohol or other types of drugs; losing or gaining weight. This gives you a bit of an idea what the Emmaus two were grappling with.

Hopelessness is desperately hard to cure. When you see someone you love and care for overtaken by an illness that goes on and on, despair sets in.

It almost becomes impossible to hope for recovery and you even become afraid to hope because you don't know if you can cope with another letdown.

And so, in our heart-break, like the Emmaus disciples, we place a cloud of hopelessness around us, and we become trapped in our misery. Our stressors often lead to us closing down, bringing down a wall and endeavouring to protect ourselves from further pain. While that can assist in some circumstances and for a time, it is not helpful in the long term.

And like these disciples, they were heading in the wrong direction – away from the pain and confusion yes, but away from the fellowship and support of the other believers.

When we become preoccupied with our dashed hopes and frustrated plans we are likely to miss Jesus and the strength found in other believers. We need to look for Jesus in our midst to experience the power and help He can bring.

These disciples didn't do this – they just assumed that Jesus was another traveler escaping what had just occurred in Jerusalem.

We know, of course, that it was the risen Jesus, but somehow they didn't recognize Him. In fact Luke tells us "they were kept from recognizing Him." Maybe they were too preoccupied to look Him in the eye. Maybe they didn't care.

What difference did it make who was walking with them? They were grieving a great loss in their lives! And along comes a chatty stranger, who hasn't got a clue about the things that happened in Jerusalem or so it seems.

The stranger asked them: "what are you discussing together as you walk along?" Their response was – are you the only one who does not know the things that have happened there in these days? And so they begin to share what had happened.

Jesus, in His infinite consideration for their brokenness, and their bewildered minds comes next to them and joins them on their journey. He enters their pain, and allows them to share their story of disappointment. And so they tell the stranger what they thought the man of Galilee was all about.

The disciples were counting on a Messiah who would rule with Power and crush the enemies of Israel and establish the Kingdom of God on earth once and for all. They didn't realize that the Messiah had come to redeem people from slavery to sin. They could not conceive of the idea of a Messiah who would suffer and die on a roman cross. When Jesus died, therefore, they lost all hope. They didn't understand that Jesus' death offered the greatest hope possible.

Jesus walks with them and He listens and then He fills their hearts with the promises from God's Word, and ultimately with hope and understanding.

The disciples knew the tomb was empty, that the women had witnessed this fact and that it was verified by some of the other disciples and that the biblical prophecies described this very event, yet they still didn't believe.

Jesus knows that downtrodden people need companionship, a listening ear not a barrage of advice. The last thing they need is a brisk "cheering up" talk or being told to "snap out of it."

So Jesus unpacks for them the full mystery of God's plan of salvation. He fills their broken hearts with a lesson in faith and hope. And so starts one of the biggest Bible lessons in history. Jesus refers to the Law the first 5 books of the Old Testament, which traditionally are ascribed to Moses.

He refers to all the Prophets – a specific collection of Hebrew Scriptures including the books of Joshua through to 2 Kings and Isaiah through to Malachi.

Today, the Resurrection still catches people by surprise. In spite of 2000 years of evidence and witness, many people refuse to believe. What more will it take?

For these disciples, it took the living Jesus in their midst. For many people today, it takes the presence of alive Christians.

The disciples shared their sadness and confusion with this "stranger". Jesus responded by going to Scripture and applying it to His ministry.

When we are puzzled by questions or problems, we too, can go to Scripture and find authoritative help. If we still do not understand we need to turn to other believers who may hold more knowledge or wisdom of the Bible. Jesus reintroduced these disciples to the Old Testament. Christ is the thread woven through all the Scriptures, the central theme that binds them together.

And so the disciples invited Jesus to come in, because the evening had fallen, and it was dangerous to travel alone after dark. Their hearts had been strangely warmed during the course of the conversation. There was bread on the table and the stranger took the bread and gave thanks. And in the act of breaking bread they recognized Him for who He was. They saw His hands – they were the nail-pierced hands of Jesus. In an instant they knew Him. And in an instant, He was gone.

I can imagine Cleopas and his friend standing in amazement; asking each other, *"Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*

They suddenly realized that Christ is risen from the dead! And the two disciples lost no time in retracing their steps to Jerusalem to share the Good News. A simple two hour walk turned into a life-transforming experience. Now their hearts were burning with passion to share with everyone what they had seen and experienced.

I guess that the journey back took less time as their hearts were burning to share the Good News. They couldn't keep it to themselves. Their broken hearts had been transformed into hearts that were on fire for their Lord!

Hope has that powerful effect on us. For us, we have assurance that Jesus is all He claimed to be and that He can bring transformation to our lives. This means that whatever our age, or our life situations, we can have hope.

We cannot simply see Jesus as the soother of individual pain; He is not a commodity whom we can use at will.

In Him, the new future has arrived and we can look forward with hope to something better and can live each day now in the light of that anticipated future.

When the pressures of life wear us down, as they did the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we can discover the life-changing presence of Jesus in the Bible, on the road with us and in the broken bread.

Let us Pray.

I have 3 props for our prayer this morning: A pair of boots; a Question mark and a piece of bread.

Gracious Father, I hold these boots as I pray for those people who are on a journey of some sort. Maybe they are traveling to a new home, or country. Maybe they are on an emotional journey such as grief, illness or excitement at the arrival of something marvellous.

Gracious Father, I hold this question mark as I pray for people who are facing difficult questions in their lives about family life, work or their faith. I pray for people in war torn countries and communities experiencing fear, poverty and uncertainty.

Gracious Father, I hold this bread as I pray for people who have a gift or ministry of making people welcome – communities, counsellors, welcomes at church, I pray for those who are working tirelessly during

this pandemic in the hospitals, community centres, aged care and nursing homes, supermarkets and others leaving home to provide for our needs.

Jesus, as You walked by the side of the two friends in their sadness and confusion, may we too, learn to walk with others when they need us most.

Jesus, as You listened to the questions of those struggling to understand and believe, may we too, learn to listen to people as they ask questions about their faith in You.

Jesus, As You willingly spent time with the two friends over a meal, may we too, learn to offer hospitality and welcome to everyone we meet.

Lead us in our journeying; teach us in our listening and meet us in our welcoming.

In Jesus Name Amen.