

“Walking with the Lord”
Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Luke 24:13-35
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Let's pray!

Lord take the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts and use them in your service, Amen!

So, we've heard the story of the road to Emmaus. It's a really well known Christian story that probably all of us know very well indeed. It's used quite frequently but I think it's one of those stories that isn't really ever going to go out of fashion, and isn't really ever going to go stale. You can hear it again and again and it's just hard to imagine it being truly overused, because however often you hear it there's something in it for you something in it for your walk of faith.

So there are two followers of Jesus, one who's named and one who isn't named. We don't know who they were but they're walking away from Jerusalem towards a place called Emmaus. It's not somewhere that we know the location of there's no modern day place called Emmaus. There's no record of where such a place might have been. But wherever it was it was one of those small villages just around Jerusalem and the text says it was about 7 miles away.

So if you imagine Jerusalem sort of seven mile arc around Jerusalem it's roughly there somewhere. I wonder how these two were walking along. Were they traveling quickly or slowly? How were they traveling? I sort of imagine that they were traveling slowly probably in quite a dejected frame of mind. They're certainly suffering from extreme confusion. They know that Jesus is dead. The Romans have crucified Him.

But they've just been told that morning something that they simply can't accept even though they really, really want to accept it. Some of his other followers a group of women have told them that they have seen Jesus alive. Now, we might imagine that that revelation would cause untold joy in their hearts they whoop and cheer and be running around like wild things, with un-contained joy.

But not a bit of it, they are confused. They may be or even disturbed by this news it's such a disturbing thing that they don't seem to be able to really process it at all and go on their way dejected and just sort of quietly talking about it to one another.

The women who told them these things that they so desperately want to be true, clearly must be mistaken. And none of us can really blame these two travellers on the road to Emmaus for an attitude like that, because it's an outlandish claim. Jesus is dead and they know it they may even have seen his dead body. They've certainly spoken to people who did see his dead body. He's dead and now someone says he's alive it makes no sense.

Maybe it is even the case that talk of Jesus being alive just causes them more pain for they know that it isn't the case and yet they just so wish that it were. And into this tangle of confusion, disappointment, despair maybe anger as well their steps a stranger. And the stranger begins to open their eyes to things that they already know. You see he's not really telling them anything new at all.

Everything that the stranger who we know to be Jesus. Everything that he's revealing to them as they walk along together is stuff that they already know. Is just haven't quite put it together in this way before. They know the scriptures well. They know everything that he's telling them. And yet this stranger expounds the scriptures for them in such a way that shows them the Messiah has to suffer and die before as the text says he enters into glory. But notice something about this story. The stranger who we know to be Jesus does not start by just instructing them.

He firstly asks them a question to find out where they're at, before he instructs he allows them to unburden themselves and to enter into relationship with him. Then they are ready to hear. Before we get to the end of the story let's just take a moment to acknowledge that it is often difficult to really believe in new, resurrected life. The world at the moment is so often a dark and terrible place.

We think of kids getting shot in the US in schools. One such incident would be too many, but it happens again and again and again. We think of those who die of drugs overdoses in Vancouver our erstwhile friends and neighbours struck down by addiction and death. We think of the senseless war killing 10s of thousands in Ukraine, we think of the newly resurgent civil war in Sudan.

There are so so many things that could be listed. Destruction, chaos, suffering, death really are all around us. And it can be hard to see our way through that and for the world to see its way through that, to see the light and the truth of the resurrection. Certainly are very secular society doesn't see. And it seems at best, wishful thinking to so many people.

But there is another side to this. We have the picture on the slides please, the next picture, that's it!

As the stranger walked and talked with those two on the road to Emmaus, there must have been something stirring in their hearts. The stranger makes as if to go on and they could have let him go on if they wanted to. But they don't do that they stop him and offer him some hospitality maybe that's just the right thing to do maybe it's the culturally appropriate thing to do. But the text rather suggests that they had an open choice at that moment about whether to invite the stranger in or just to let him pass by on his way.

There's no pressure the text suggests, to continue that relationship with this man that they didn't even know the name of. But they invite him in nevertheless that leads to everything

changing. They sit at supper and the stranger breaks bread and in that moment they recognize Jesus. There's a moment of absolute clarity when they see the risen Lord. And yet here is Jesus, before them making himself completely obvious and transparent to them. Something they hadn't been expecting at all.

Suddenly in that simple act they see Jesus all of his words on the road were important but they couldn't quite get to this conclusion to this moment of clarity, until there's that simple action and he is revealed to them. And in that moment of seeing, Jesus vanishes from their site.

It's only a moment it's the fleeting of fleeting glances, it's, it's a moment that they see him but it doesn't matter because that moment was true and real. And it was there to be experienced in their deepest sense of self, the deepest truth of the presence of the risen Lord. And it's that moment of insight into the presence of the risen Lord that flips their whole world upside down. And one image of that is an optical illusion, where you think you're seeing the real thing but actually you're not. The image on the screen is some of you will have seen it before, some of you might not.

It did the rounds on the Internet about a year maybe a year and a half ago. At first glance what most people see is a picture. Could very well be a painting of the seashore. There's a sandy beach, there's waves, the beach has got some sunshine on it but it's stormy out to sea and you kind of get the impression that the storm is heading towards the beach in all likelihood. But of course it's an optical illusion and the image is no such thing it's actually a very close up picture of a damaged car door.

The damaged car door is what you're looking at there there's the ground underneath the car door and somebody scraped the bottom of it on a piece of stone or something like that. But without being able to see the whole picture of the car it looks like something that it's not. It's even possible to construct as I did for you with the image of the seashore, the whole world around this fake view of an image. A world that's off course entirely false. And in the case of the disciples they had quite understandably constructed a whole world based on the bit that they could see, that Jesus was dead.

And it's hard once you've seen something like that to break out of that way of viewing the world. A few people might well have worked out that it wasn't the seashore in that image. But once you see it as the seashore you kind of get locked into that way of viewing things and it's just the same as the disciples they saw that little bit of the world that Jesus was dead.

But the presence of the risen Christ suddenly makes them see the world in a kind of zoomed out sort of way. All of their expectations of how the world operated are completely inverted turned upside down. The dead do not need to stay dead. There is more to this existence than they had ever thought before. God's power is overall and not limited by the way that we small human beings see the universe.

God's power is not limited by our imagination. God sees the whole picture in that zoomed out way and invites the disciples and then asked too, to step into that way of viewing the world to have our own view of the world enlarged. They are those two disciples let into something that isn't really a secret as such but they just let into the whole picture, a more complete vision of reality. What had seemed unreal turned out to be the most real thing in the world. What had seemed to be only a cause of distress for them, a cause of worry was now, a cause for celebration.

Once they know that Christ is risen, then they don't even wait the night in Emmaus but feel compelled to run as quickly as possible back to Jerusalem to share that joy with the rest of Jesus followers their friends. Turning around, turning upside down that perception of the world is really mirrored in that dejected walk away from Jerusalem and that joyful run back towards Jerusalem. Their world has been enlarged and they respond in an appropriate way. On their return they find that their enlarged view of the world is validated by what others have also experienced.

Just as sometimes we might struggle with faith just as the world struggles with faith with belief in the resurrection and so on. So too that's one of the reasons that we gather in church. The same reason as those two returned and talked to others about their faith for one thing they wanted to tell others so that they could share this joy, but also it's important to get the validation of what others are also saying, sharing in one another's joy, sharing in one another's experience, and holding that together as a joint memory.

It's the same for us. When we gather in church I guess that we gather because at some point we've caught at least a glimpse of the risen Christ. That at some point the presence of the risen Christ has been a very immediate and visceral reality for us. But we are here also together to remind one another of what we have all glimpsed. It's not something that I just happened to notice and later on convinced myself, I'd been wrong about that.

By coming together we remind ourselves of the truth of what we have all in our different ways seen and experienced. No one knows where Emmaus was. And that is a good thing. Maybe it's as it should be, because, the precise location of these events isn't the important thing. What happened at Emmaus is something that potentially happens everywhere at all times.

Just as Jesus was present with the two on the road so too is he present today he is present with us in the church, he is present with us when we are truly here singing our hearts and minds out in song and joy. And he's with us also at those other times those times when we're not really sure at all and are confused. He's walking alongside us and all people who are altogether unaware of his presence. The risen Lord walks with us and lives more deeply with us day by day as we live more deeply into the Christian faith we may even be more aware of him walking alongside us, being more aware of his risen presence in our lives.

One final thought. The story of the walk to Emmaus in that story Jesus teaches his two friends and reveals his presence to them. All of us know people outside the church as well as people inside the church. All of us have folk who we are already walking beside. All of us have folk who we can provide a gentle companionable witness to. It may sound scary or even presumptuous, but part of the Christian life is indeed walking with others just as Jesus walked with those two on the road.

If we can walk and talk and witness our faith to others then there may come a moment when they too glimpse the presence of the risen Christ and find their world changed with an entirely new perspective that zoomed out perspective, where we see the resurrection not as a story only, but as the deepest reality of the world. This need not be something that we do for thousands of people. Jesus spent that time walking and talking with just two on that afternoon.

So! two things to think about over the course of the week maybe.

What does the presence of Jesus mean for you what does the presence of Jesus mean for you?

And with whom can you walk?

So, I wish you well in your walking!

May we all have the presence of the risen Christ with us now and always, Amen!