

## **Luke 24:13-35**

### **The Road to Emmaus**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Imagine making an essential visit to Foodland to buy some groceries, and as you're paying for them you're chatting with the checkout operator about all these coronavirus restrictions, and the panic buying and the empty shelves, and the person waiting behind you asks, "What are you talking about? What's this coronavirus thing?" How could they not know? Everything is about coronavirus. Everyone's lives have been changed because of this pandemic. Surely everyone knows what it is.

This is the sort of confusion we see in the road to Emmaus story. The two disciples were walking and talking, discussing the events of Good Friday, the death of their Rabbi, their teacher. They're trying to figure out what it all meant in light of the things Jesus had said beforehand. The Greek here implies that they were not just talking, they were "examining the evidence" together. They were looking for the truth. And yet they didn't recognise the one who is the way the truth and life when he joined them on that road. Not straight away at least.

Remember, this event happened on the day of the resurrection. This is still that very first Easter Sunday. These two on the road appear to be part of the larger group of disciples beyond just the twelve apostles. This is the group that included the women who had gone to the tomb at the start of the day and returned with the news that the tomb was empty. Skip to the end of the day and these two are walking and talking, trying to make sense of what they've been told. And as these two are talking about Jesus, he appears there with them. But they didn't recognise who he was. To them, he was just another traveller on the road and so they included him in their conversation.

One thing this does show is that Jesus had a true physical body after his resurrection. His body had been raised from the dead. There was something different going on here, but it was still a physical body. He's not just some ghostly apparition, as he would prove later in the story when he sits down with them for a meal. And he indeed proves it again in the same way in the next passage when he appears to the apostles in the upper room. So, it is the same Jesus, risen from the dead. And yet they do not recognise him. It was the same with Mary when she sees the empty tomb and asks the gardener where they have taken Jesus, not recognising that the man she thought was the gardener was, in fact, the risen Lord Jesus.

One thing we can take from this lack of recognition is that many of Jesus' disciples were not expecting him to rise from the dead. Despite all that he had said and taught, this wasn't their expectation. Here on the road to Emmaus, this pair express their disappointment because they had been hoping that Jesus "was the one to redeem Israel," but the events of the past few days had put an end to that hope. Their disappointment that Jesus did not redeem Israel, or set it free, shows they are still thinking of the Messiah in political terms. They were not expecting a Messiah who would rise from the dead to set all people free from sin and death. And so, they did not yet believe.

Like so many others, belief in the risen Lord Jesus came only after he appeared to them. But there is more to it than that. In some of the accounts, we have phrases like "he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" or in today's reading, "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him". And this is still true today. We cannot by our own understanding or strength come to believe in the risen Lord Jesus. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us that we have faith, that our eyes are opened, and that we can confess that Jesus is alive, that he is our Lord and Saviour.

For the two on the road to Emmaus, this enlightening doesn't even happen as Jesus explains the scriptures to them. Beginning with Moses and the prophets he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. And they knew the events of Easter so far. In their confusion of meeting someone who seemingly had no idea about the events that transpired in Jerusalem, they make a pretty good confession of what Jesus had done. But it's only in the second part of the story, as they come to the place they are staying and gather at the table, that their eyes are opened. Only when Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them, do they realise who he is. And Luther once wrote that this is how things work for so many new believers. They invite Jesus in, not fully understanding who he is, not necessarily asking for the right thing, and he still comes. And we all do this in various ways as well, when we pray to God not really asking for things in accordance with his will, but God still answers us. Often in different and better ways than we ask, but he does answer us. And so, having invited this stranger in, and having discovered that he is, in fact, the risen Lord Jesus, they had to go share this wonderful news.

The parallels to our normal worship practices are pretty big here. The event is on a Sunday, the day of the resurrection. There are at least two gathered. There is the interpreting of scripture, the proclamation of Jesus, and the sharing of the sacrament. And then afterwards there is the going out to share the good news with others. This basic pattern has not changed in 2000 years. This is where the faith of all believers is sustained.

All this is why our current restrictions are difficult. We long to gather in the presence of Jesus, we long to hear his word proclaimed, we long to visit his table and receive his sacrament. In this present time, there is no easy answer. We can still read God's word for ourselves. We can still gather as families, as households around the Word of God, knowing that Jesus is present with us. We can still hear or read the Word proclaimed to us. And we can still share the good news of Jesus with others.

It is not easy, and it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that our faith can be sustained through this. But that is the normal course of events for all Christians throughout history. Our faith is not sustained by our own efforts. Our talking and discussing the scriptures comes to nothing without God opening our eyes and our minds to see his truth, just as Jesus did for the pair on the road to Emmaus. God is not restrained by our present circumstances, and his Spirit continues to grow faith in us. We belong to Jesus because we have been baptised into his death, even if we temporarily cannot share in his sacrament.

So, we wait patiently in the strength the Lord gives us. We do what is necessary to help protect the health and wellbeing of our neighbour. And we praise God that he is faithful to us, that he gives us his Holy Spirit, that he did send Jesus to suffer and die in our place, and that Jesus lives. Jesus is risen from the dead. Jesus is with us now and will keep us in his presence forever. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds safe in the risen Lord Jesus. Amen.