

The Road to Emmaus

The death and resurrection of Jesus are the greatest source of hope in human history. The resurrection of Jesus is so radical, so life changing, if we can but grasp it, yet it seems so hard to really take it in. I need to keep thinking about it. Fortunately the bible reading for today's talk is a resurrection story. Jon mentioned it in his talk on Easter Sunday so it's great we can have another look at it. The Road to Emmaus, at first sight, is the story of 2 dejected people, walking along the road, chatting to a stranger who turns out to be Jesus. But it's so much more than that. It is such a rich story, I'm sure it has more to teach me than I can see at the moment. But I love the fact that on the day of his resurrection Jesus had time for 2 of his followers from the wider group. We don't need to be in the inner circle for Jesus to notice us. Let's hear the story.

Bible reading Luke 24:13-35

Biblical pictures painted by these stories can often be equated to our own lives. Here the 2 are on a journey, walking away from Jerusalem. What about our spiritual journeys? Where are we heading? The 2 are talking, there are probably others on the road heading home after the Passover festival. A man draws closer and engages them in conversation. We are told this is Jesus, himself, as if extra emphasis is needed. But they don't recognise Him and he doesn't announce himself. He is concerned for them. He wants to know what they are talking about. Jesus meets them where they are. Cleopas explains why they are so sad. "We had hoped that Jesus was the one who was going to redeem Israel". Only when they have shared everything they wanted to say does Jesus speak, telling them all that was prophesied about Him, over the centuries, in the scriptures. What impact does hearing scripture expounded like this have?

I remember a time when I was feeling really low. I couldn't settle to anything and I picked up a little booklet that our dear friend Moya had given me. It listed all the New Testament promises about Jesus. In Him is life, in Him all things were created, in Him all things hold together, in Him we have redemption by His blood, forgiveness of sins, I could go on..... I read the whole book aloud to myself. As I finished I realised that I felt quite different, peaceful, yet energised. I can't say I felt my heart burning within me, like the disciples in our story, but I definitely felt better. Rather than feeling caught up in my own concerns, I believe that as I read about Jesus, by His grace He showed me the bigger picture, He was there with me and I gained confidence that he was more than enough to help me.

The concerns of the 2 disciples were much greater than mine. They were devastated, felt they had lost everything. They had so hoped that Jesus would bring an end to their suffering and the suffering of their people due to the Roman occupation(and today we could insert suffering due to the coronavirus pandemic) but Jesus showed them that the way of victory would come not by avoiding suffering but through suffering. His promise isn't that we won't suffer. It is that whatever happens He won't leave us; He will sustain us through whatever happens. Our story is definitely an example of this. Jesus is with us whether we are aware of His presence or not.

I imagine the 2 disciples were feeling very different, uplifted and hopeful, as they reached the end of their journey and encouraged Jesus to stay with them. They didn't want their time with Him to end. So they sit down to a meal together and this is where we get to the really mysterious bit of the story. In the breaking of the bread, or communion, their eyes are opened, they recognise Jesus and He disappears. In this blinding flash of recognition they are able to grasp the truth of the most hopeful event in human history. Jesus Christ has risen from the grave! Everything turns around. Then it all makes sense, it's true what they were told this morning, Jesus really has risen and they have seen him. They are so excited and filled with energy that they literally turn back along the road to tell the other disciples what has happened. Jesus was with them all the time but they only became aware of this in hindsight. I wonder how often Jesus is alongside us and we just can't see Him? Today He will be in our hospitals and care homes, with emergency workers, everywhere people are crying out for help, blinded by grief. But He'll still be with us too!

I started this talk saying how hard I find it to grasp the concept of resurrection. What ever I can grasp will be God's gift. Believing Jesus was resurrected is one thing but believing that I will be too! That's another matter! What I'm wondering is does that fact that we don't want to die, we want to continue to live, mean that God has written resurrection hope in all of our hearts. Is resurrection a pattern God has built into all creation? The Spring following winter, plants emerging from the ground to grow and blossom again, birds building nests. The pattern of loss and renewal. Can we see it in our own lives?

There is a powerful 3 word sentence at the end of our story. "It is true!" The resurrection is true. No wonder in our little Easter Sunday videos, that Jon added to the end of the service, we all said " Alleluia!"