

Luke 24. 13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Walking with Jesus

Luke's Gospel is full of journeys. To mention but a few: Jesus is born on a journey his parents take from Nazareth to Bethlehem; in the two best-loved parables, both found only in Luke, the good Samaritan shows kindness to a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, and a younger son wanders to a far land and back again to his father's love; and, in today's remarkable story, two inconsolable followers of Jesus walk unknowingly with him along the seven or so miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. In the Book of Acts, Luke's second volume, Jesus's followers travel outwards from the holy city of Jerusalem throughout the Eastern Roman Empire, and it ends with Paul having traveled to Rome itself, where, under house arrest, he preaches the gospel to all who will listen to him.

Lots of journeys! Why? Well, Luke is educating us into how we know God. On all these travels, someone suddenly, if only for a moment, gets it about God. Of all Luke's traveling stories, perhaps the most important is the journey to Emmaus. A French writer once described it as the most beautiful short story ever written and though, on principle, I never agree with Frenchmen, I'm happy to make an exception in this case.

Jesus has just been crucified. A couple of days after, some of his followers heard stories that he was risen from the dead. One of them, Cleopas, and his friend went on a walk, no doubt to put some distance between themselves and the tragic execution of their leader, to try to make sense of it. As they journey, Jesus turns up and walks with them, all unknown. Like a university professor among her students, he gently rebukes them for having misunderstood everything of importance about the matter in hand.

It's a constant complaint of Jesus in the Gospels that the disciples just don't get it. They're so keen on Jesus fulfilling their agenda, that they're unable to take on his. Just like so many pastors and politicians today, so it is here. Cleopas and his friend talk of defeating the Romans and creating an Israel run by and for the Jews. Jesus, instead, talks of the mystery of divine providence and of the necessity of suffering. They stop

lamenting their failed hopes and instead listen to him. But what they really get isn't the difficult theology he's telling them. That'll take time for them to process, and they'll have the rest of their lives to work it through. What they immediately understand and recognize is a characteristic action. They ask him to eat with them; he blesses the meal, they glimpse the man they knew, and he vanishes. Their hearts are filled with joy, and they rush back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples "what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread".

Those Christians who know what Christians must say and do have, in reality, disengaged themselves from Luke's demand that we walk with Jesus, mostly not understanding, so needing to listen and learn. If our views about abortion, or the poor, or healthcare, or suffering, or Muslims: if all these things, and many more, were shaped by Christians who walk daily with Jesus, and use prayer as a time for silence, so that God can get in a word edgeways, the world would surely be a better place. As it is, we have too many religious town criers, broadcasting their self-advantageous and petty certainties as though they were God's. Heaven help us!

I wonder if you noticed that only one of the two pilgrims to Emmaus is given a name: Cleopas. At the end of her novel *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte has her heroine declare about Mr. Rochester: "Reader! I married him", artfully drawing us into the story to make it come alive to us. Emmaus's anonymous character is Luke's Jane Eyre moment: we're invited into the story to become the other pilgrim on the road to wherever it takes us in the presence of Jesus, listening, and learning and, occasionally, even getting what we must be and do.

We're about to share in Brandon's ministry, journeying with him so that together we may learn more about what God wants from us as individuals and as a church.

Most good journeys have a destination. So: what is our Emmaus? What will be our end, our meaning, our goal? When Jesus returned from death, Cleopas and his other

followers didn't recognize him; not entirely, I think, because of their spiritual blindness, but because death is so great a mystery, one that we all eventually face at the end of life's journey. In the face of mystery, it is usually best to be silent.

Except, we do know that Jesus teaches us that God loves all she has made, more than our deserving. So, we can hope for the fulfilment of that love, without exactly knowing the what or the how. As William Shakespeare put it:

Journeys end in lovers meeting
Every wise man's son doth know

Eternal God

It seems serendipitous that our church should acquire a new Senior Minister in the season of Easter. Despite everything awful in the world, from an impersonal pandemic to persons who act cruelly and selfishly, Easter promises renewal, the hope of good days ahead.

So, we pray joyfully for Brandon, and for Charles, that they may settle happily and usefully into our church and the wider community and prove a blessing to us all. Any church, of course, is made up of much more than its pastor, so we also pray for our staff, our committee leaders and members, volunteers, and all who find this building a holy place, and the people who come here friends and colleagues on the journey of faith.

As we look to the future, we are grateful for the past; for the immediate past, for sure, so we remember Gary, and pray for him and Judy, and also for Joe. We are all just a small part of this church's long history that, at its best, has embraced diversity, stood up for issues of social justice, and helped to mend the world.

For the world we pray, especially for countries where people suffer under unjust rulers.
Help us to give generously of our time and talents and money, so that goodness and kindness flourish where otherwise would be indifference or worse.

May your name be blessed forever: AMEN

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sin,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.