

**On the road***Luke 24:13-35*

Of all the resurrection appearances of Jesus, this one for many is the loveliest. When we had evening services, on Easter Sunday evening a senior elder would always request, in advance, that this story be told. For him it moved the Easter story out of Jerusalem, even if not by far, as the good news of what Easter meant began to whisper out into the world.

Three weeks into the Church's great fifty-day celebration of Easter, we are reminded that this greatest of events in the Christian calendar is a cross-roads moment. We don't stay put in the Upper Room and the Last Supper and the foot-washing; we aren't immobilised by grief at the foot of the cross or outside the rolled-stone covered tomb; we aren't emptied by bereavement on Holy Saturday hiding in darkness behind closed doors. We aren't even in the cool of the dawn-grey garden on Easter morning outside an empty tomb, or bemused and blinking in the Upper Room on that first Easter evening. We are on the road.

We are on the road with Cleopas and an unnamed disciple on the road to Emmaus, that little village seven miles outside Jerusalem. The different Easter resurrection stories are written to make us think as the impact of the reality of Jesus focuses on the various human responses to the Good News of what God has done and continues to do in human lives. Easter is meant to become more than an anniversary celebration. It intrudes into the lives of real people, evoking worship, confession, repentance, communion, transformation, obedience and mutual love. We are invited to reflect on the changed lives of the friends and followers of Jesus. When people in the time immediately heard the stories about Jesus they were, 'cut to the heart'. Whilst we know nothing of the logistics and biology of resurrection, people who heard and believed even if they did not

fully understand felt that something had shifted in their lives. Jesus, somehow, had made a difference, and they felt impelled, somehow, to respond. No longer to sit still but to get up and move. On the road.

When we hear the story of the Road to Emmaus there is no secret about the resurrection of Jesus to be disclosed to us. Instead, what I believe we discover is a story of how disbelief is dispelled, how two deeply involved disciples are able to move beyond their memories of Jesus to their experience of Jesus. Initially they do not see it was Jesus Who has joined them on the road as they walk to Emmaus. So Jesus is patient, as He always is, and talks and teaches, as He always does, and seemed to be going on further, as was often His way, but stops and stays with them in an act of hospitality, which was at the heart of His ministry, and in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of wine at a table, eyes were opened.

On the road the movement is from blindness to sight, from disbelief to faith, from sadness to delight. On the road to Emmaus, and then on the road from Emmaus, these two disciples begin to understand Who Jesus is, and why it mattered that they recognised Him.

On the road to Emmaus the focus on Jesus helped His followers create a coherent story about not what God looked like, but what God does. Avoiding the need for idolatrous, commandment-breaking AI generated images of human leaders with a Messiah complex; or recent converts to Catholicism lecturing the Pope about what the Bible really means; or senior politicians offering a prayer not based on a real Bible verse that they claimed, but a quotation from the film Pulp Fiction.

On the road to Emmaus the focus on Jesus helps His followers work out how to build communities of support and trust and generosity, and not the destruction of a whole civilisation. It brings into light Jesus' modelling of hospitality to the last and the least and the lost, at a table where all are welcome. Isn't it telling, that when they arrived at Emmaus and were seated at the table, a table

the disciples thought *they* had set, that they find that *Jesus* is the host, the One they eventually recognised. Isn't it telling, that at a table with Christ as host, they recognised that because of Him and with Him and after Him, *"...each act of solidarity and forgiveness becomes a morsel of bread for humanity need of care, a nourishment that sustains our conscience and steadies us in dark hours of fear and amid the shadow of suffering."* Nourished, surprised, eyes opened, they are enabled to make their way back to Jerusalem that very night and share with others their experience of the Jesus they recognised.

On the road then and now, Jesus focuses the minds of His followers on the stories of the Bible which point to what God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit came to do and continues to do in the world. A clear warning for today, as Pope Leo said recently, *"...to those who manipulate religion and the very name of God for their own military, economic, and political gain, dragging that which is sacred into darkness and filth..."* And, *"...in a world that thirsts for peace, enough of war and all the pain it causes through death and destruction and exile!"*

On the road, then and now, is the message from Jesus today, through Christian leaders like Pope Leo, that, *"...God's heart is torn apart by wars, violence, injustice and lies. But our Father's heart is not with the wicked, the arrogant, or the proud. God's heart is with the little ones and the humble, and with them He builds up His Kingdom of love and peace day by day. Wherever there is love and service, God is there."*

On the road, recognising Jesus, disciples then and now are called to put into practice what the impact of being a Christian is. Challenging, unsettling, inspiring, demanding, soul-searching, real. In this present darkness we learn again, from the recent words of Pope Leo, that: *"War divides; hope unites. Arrogance tramples upon others; love lifts up. Idolatry blinds us; the living God*

*enlightens. All it takes is a little faith, a mere "crumb" of faith, in order to face this dramatic hour in history together — as humanity and alongside humanity"*

On the road, recognising Jesus. Cleopas and the unnamed disciple set out from Jerusalem to Emmaus in hopelessness and helplessness. Blinded by grief and fear they did not recognise the One Who joined them on the journey, on the road. As the shadows lengthened and the day was far spent, the compelled their travelling companion to stay with them, and talk more with them, and eat with them. Then, somehow, they saw and recognized and understood. Jesus vanished, and the once grief-isolated disciples go back to Jerusalem into the wider community of disciples still gathered there, and told them of what had happened, and that Jesus was known to them. On the road, in the teaching, in the breaking of the bread, and blessing, in their lives.

In the history of our world, and our Church, we have surely come to another crossroad. When Jesus first appeared to the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus they, "stood still." Then He talked, then they walked, and the process of slow realization began to dawn on them. Are we at this point in the history of our world and our Church standing still? Stopped by the grimness of the global news, or the mountains of challenge that face us as a congregation and wider Church, where it is not immediately clear to us what to do, or where to go. Are we stuck? Or are we finding in our personal lives, in our work lives, in our school or college or university lives, in our city and community and national lives, in our world lives, that the still revealing presence of Jesus can be made known to us once more. We see Him. We hear Him. We feel Him. And on the road we go again.

We were lost and He has found us. He was lost and we have found Him. And in the finding and the recognising and the understanding we are given the strength, just about enough, to keep going. On the road. We welcome and we include. We share hospitality and we organise events

and services of worship. We give of our time and talents and money. Unfrozen, our faltering footsteps go forward, not alone but with each other, and with Him.

On the road. The sense of movement and dynamic in this ancient story is remarkable. Jesus comes among us in surprise, and we journey from fear to trust, from doubt to joy, from disbelief to hope, from grief to witness. From standing still to moving on. On the road. With Jesus. Still.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**

**Amen**

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*<sup>i</sup> Pope Leo XIV*