

Two on the Road

Third Sunday of Easter (A)

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Let us pray - Lord Jesus, on this journey of faith, join with us that we might know you and your will for us. - Amen.

I want to ask you to draw upon your imagination for a moment. Think about the scene that Luke describes:

For Cleopas and his companion, each step was an effort. It was only seven miles to Emmaus, but it would take them all day to get there. Their hearts were as heavy as their feet. It was over - the triumphant entry into Jerusalem was only a week earlier but was now a distant memory. It was crushed by the events of the Friday. Jesus, the great hope of the future, of the new kingdom, was gone, crushed by the system. It was over, he was dead, and nothing would change now. The only thing to do was to go back home.

Of course, there was the story that the women had told - that the tomb was empty, that he was alive, but they could not believe that: wishful thinking or the delusion of grief. For them, it was over - Jesus was dead, and with him, the hope of something new was gone. And burning in their hearts was the question - Why? Why?

As they trudged on, they talked of these things. As they turned on the road towards the afternoon sun, a stranger drew near, with his cloak drawn around his face to shield his eyes from the harsh rays. He came up alongside and spoke. His voice was warm, comforting and gentle,

and they poured out their grief to him. He spoke to them of the scriptures and how in God's plan, the Messiah would suffer, and he reached into their loneliness and touched their hearts.

But now, they had reached the destination, and he seemed to want to go on. But they convinced him to stay, and as they sat to break bread, all fell into place, and they knew it was him. With joy, they ran back to the others - He is alive, Jesus is alive and not dead, and suddenly nothing else mattered. God broke through, and they knew, they knew why.

The concept of faith as a journey has always appealed to me. It is a journey by which each new twist or turn reveals something new about God, his Son or his purposes. It may be part of my training as a geologist, which has made me think best when I am on my feet, moving across the landscape and developing my own picture of what lies beneath my feet. There is always more that can be found, another stone to turn over. I have found faith like that.

If we take this familiar story from Luke seriously, we are given today a blueprint for celebrating the Christian life as an Easter people. Cleopas and his companion went for a walk. The journey they took was far more than merely physical. They engaged in the journey of faith. And it began for them in the throes of hurt, disappointment and, perhaps, bitterness. Their conversation had no movement save for a circular bantering. It was not until the Risen One interpreted the meaning of death for them, in the larger picture, that they could see the realities of human living within the context of saving faith.

But though they came to understand with their minds, they still needed to see the author of their understanding. In the breaking of the bread, they came to faith in the crucified and risen Christ.

Like the two companions, all Christians must enter into the three rhythms of faith's story as we find it today in this narrative. First, the pilgrimage of the Christian life does not guarantee that our daily existence will be exempt from the rocks and dust that are part and parcel of simply being human. We encounter the harsh realities of our personal and societal lives, and we know that believers have no escape from the problems of loneliness, despair, violence and poverty. We must walk the road if the word is truly to set the world on fire.

Second, in walking the road, we must take the risk and allow the Lord to walk with us and help us to understand. Jesus walks with us in our lack of understanding, hurting, and bitterness. Christians will encounter the evils of life. But there is the invitation from God that we surrender our lack of understanding into the hands of Christ, who is always there to console and heal.

Finally, we must remember who walks with us in our daily labours. This Christ is no mere supplier of answers to human questions. This Christ embraced the very most profound questions of what it means to be human. Jesus embraced our fear of death, the abandonment of the cross, the soft wood of human nature. But where do we find the presence of the Risen One?

Like Cleopas and his companion, we gather for our meal and remember. We remember that God and all women and men discover one another in bread and its shaping. There it is that we meet and find life itself, a life that goes beyond death. We realise it in the crumbs that fall from the tables of our daily living. We repeatedly discover it in the crumbs that fall upon our table of thanksgiving. And when we, a pilgrim, have taken our walk with a God who, in Christ, walks with us in this life, we are then sat down at a table, and there we break bread to satisfy our hunger. And when we do this, do not also our hearts burn?

Where are you on that journey today? Are you buffeted by the hurts of hopes dashed and dreams shattered? Do you feel that God has got it wrong? That God is missing from the picture?

Or do you find Jesus speaking to you as the stranger through the scriptures and his messengers? The words are of comfort, and you understand, but it is in the head and not the heart?

Or are you at the table with him, seeing him as a friend, risen from the dead? Are your eyes open? Ready to leave all else behind to tell the story that he is risen and you have seen him?

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, Risen one. Draw us to the table that we might see you and know in our hearts the wonder of your resurrection. Warm our hearts and excite us that we might have renewed the desire to proclaim that He is Risen to the world. Alleluia! AMEN.

AMEN