

**Podcast for Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April – based on Luke 24:13-35 (NRSV)**

Today's gospel reading is one that is very dear to me, and to many others, no doubt! The story of 'The Walk to Emmaus' as the Good News Bible frames it. For me though, although the fact of it being a walk is important (more of that in a moment) – the key fact is that it's an encounter between Jesus and 2 people who had their eyes opened and their hearts set on fire.

Let's have a look at what the story tells us: It's set on that first Easter Day, with 2 of Jesus' followers travelling to Emmaus, a place we're told is about 7 miles from Jerusalem. We might spend a while trying to work out where Emmaus actually was, or is now, but this is not known for certain and misses the point: it's not the place that matters but the journey and their encounter with their fellow traveller.

Who are these two? Again, it's not certain. At the beginning of the story they are just referred to as, 'two of them', following on from the previous verses in Luke 24, where the women who have visited the empty tomb and go to tell Jesus' followers ('the eleven and all the rest') what they have found. In the story one is identified as 'Cleopas', the other unnamed – perhaps his wife? But again, it isn't really *who* they are that matters here, just that they met who they met and shared what they shared.

They walk and talk, discussing all that they had witnessed, when they are joined by another traveller. We know it's Jesus but they don't; we are let in on the secret, they still have to have that revealed to them, as it would seem that they can't 'see Jesus' – their lack of physical awareness a metaphor for their lack of understanding in faith.

Their new companion on the road asks them what they're discussing and they stop and look sad and one, the named one – Cleopas, wonders at this stranger's seeming lack of knowledge of the current events – 'Surely, you must know what's been going on here?' We know their companion knows only too well what's happened in Jerusalem but he gives them space to share their hopes, disappointments and bewilderments before gently and thoroughly starting to help them understand so much more.

With this understanding conveyed and the journey bringing them all near to the village, Jesus acts as if he's going to leave their company and travel on beyond their destination. They press him to stay with them, as evening approaches – and he accepts their hospitality. I wonder if they also wanted to hear more from him, spend more time in his company? Were they beginning to 'see' a little more of the wonder of this person who travelled with them perhaps?

The scene then switches to a meal table and the invited guest shifts to act as the host – the one offered hospitality, now breaks bread before them and shares this with them AND THEN THEY SEE! Their eyes were opened, they recognised him and in that moment he vanishes from their sight – now they get it, now they've seen the risen Jesus. In this split-second of startling revelation and insight, they understand that the one who had travelled with them before the Crucifixion, is the same one who travels with them now – HE IS ALIVE!

And they then can't help but rush back, all the way they've just come, even though it's late at night, to find and tell their news to the other followers - the eleven and their companions. I wonder if it's significant that where previously Luke calls the additions to the disciples, 'the others' (vs.9), here they are called 'companions' (vs. 33)? Perhaps the insight of these two companions of Jesus, on the road to Emmaus, makes companions of all those who now seek to walk with their risen Saviour, confident in the knowledge that he travels with them.

This story contains a massive shift in understanding of the two travellers – from sadness, doubt, inability to see clearly, a certain degree of 'stuckness', if you will allow that improper word – to joy, certainty, clarity of inner vision and an uncontrollable urge to go, to share, to live!

It's a good story, a cherished story of faith, an inspiration to us all but this year it seems to me to be particularly meaningful. I said earlier that I thought the fact that it was a walk was important and I think it is, as well as the fact that the action reaches its most significant moment, indoors around a meal table and then concludes with another group gathered, quite possibly shut away in a room, in fear of their lives.

At the moment, with the current lockdown in place and having been extended for a further period of at least three weeks, we are spending most of our time, shut away indoors. Many of us are trying to make the best of that with meals and conversations (virtual and those with people we actually live alongside) as well as making the most of our bit of exercise outdoors, which for many people is a walk – either alone, or with human (or canine) companions.

I don't think I need to labour the point about the parallels I see between this story and ours right now, how it may speak hope into our present circumstances: that in our walking, we may know Jesus' reassuring and guiding presence with us; in our times stuck indoors, perhaps this story can offer us the comfort of the risen Jesus with us where we are, revealing himself afresh to us and offering us a way forward where life seems so strange, frightening and uncertain; in those moments when we really 'see', that we might offer words of joy, and hope and comfort to others in Jesus' name.

In this story, in these days, I hear God's all-powerful love, with the companionship of the risen Jesus, conveyed by the assurance of the Holy Spirit, say to us:

HAVE HOPE!

I AM WITH YOU!

THIS IS NOT THE END!

LOVE AND LIGHT WILL CONQUER!

HANG ON IN THERE!

And in case you need to find some other things to help you 'see' Jesus more clearly, and fill some of that 'indoors time' with things that help you to feel connected to his risen presence and the community of others who believe, you might want to take a look at the following things on the internet:

The Methodist Church has loads of worship resources on its website ([www.methodistchurch.org.uk](http://www.methodistchurch.org.uk)) for this lockdown time – see the section headed ‘Worship during the Coronavirus pandemic’. Two things might be of particular relevance to today’s thoughts – the Love Feast and the Act of Spiritual Communion – either or both might help you imagine Jesus with you as you ‘break bread’ or connect with others in prayer. There is also the wonderful Taketime meditations ([www.taketime.org.uk](http://www.taketime.org.uk)) created by Rev Clive McKie from Reigate that help you to imagine yourself into an encounter with Jesus (could be on a walk or something less strenuous!), speak with him and hear him speak back to you.

If you don’t have easy access to these things, then you might just like to pause the next time you go for a walk or you sit down to eat something, remember this story from Luke and look around and within you for where Jesus’ presence is made known to you in that moment. It might be in the company you have on your journey or the beauty of the natural world waking up into spring, in the understanding and love of those around you, in the care that has gone into a meal being prepared, or in the person that helped you with your shopping.

Wherever, however and in whomever you ‘see’ Jesus – just cherish that insight and give thanks for our God who comes to us, gives life to give us life and loves us always.

*A prayer by Julie Hulme to end:*

O God of life, you are the one who comes to us out of the mystery;  
who walks with us, unrecognized, as the stranger on our road;  
who speaks to our bewilderment and grief, our need for company and compassion:  
We adore you! Amen.