

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

This morning we will be looking at another one of the wonderful stories in Luke's gospel – the walk to Emmaus. This story is only found in Luke's gospel, with this very brief mention in Mark

...after this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country.

The full story, as Luke tells it, begins

...Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem...

Have you, like me, always assumed that the two people whom Jesus met on the road to Emmaus were two men. This is what we would expect in such a male dominant society and given the scarce mention of women in the Bible stories. Every picture ever painted to illustrate this story shows two men with Jesus. Luke gives a name to one of them – Cleopas – perhaps because we have heard that name before. The other traveller remains nameless.

The Cleopas in Luke 24:18 is thought to be the same person as Clopas, mentioned in John 19:25 because of the reference to the woman standing at the cross...

...Jesus' mother and her sister Mary the wife of Clopas...

A spelling error may have occurred between John and Luke, but they are believed to be the same person.

Mark 15:40 also describes the women at the cross

... there were also women looking on at a distance; among them Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James the younger and of Joses...

And again in Mark 16:1

*... **Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James** brought spices to prepare the body of Jesus.*

A number of commentators now believe that the two people on the road to Emmaus were husband and wife, Cleopas and Mary.

Dr. James Boice says,

It is true that John spells the name a bit differently. But the spelling of names often varied in antiquity, and here the two names undoubtedly refer to the same person. Thus, we learn that the wife of Cleopas was also present in Jerusalem at the time of the Crucifixion. And we may, therefore, assume that she was the one returning to Emmaus with him on the morning of the Resurrection.

REFLECTION

...we had hoped

Cleopas and his friend had high hopes about Jesus.

...we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel

The Messiah, it was thought, would come and drive out the Romans and all the other oppressors in a great victory and justice would reign.

But Jesus was dead! He didn't even fight back. It's not as if his followers were unwilling to fight, as they did in the Garden of Gethsemane. But Jesus stopped them. He insisted they did not resist. The crucifixion of Jesus was the complete and final devastation of their hope.

So, here they are, walking away from Jerusalem – on the road to Emmaus. We all know the story.

THE STORY

Two followers trudge home, eager to get as far away from Jerusalem as fast as they could. Perhaps they were afraid they would suffer the same fate as Jesus. In their despair, Jesus approaches them and is unrecognised. He walks with them and begins to make the story of his life and death a way of opening the imagination of his disciples to a new interpretation of the texts which they already knew. They see the scriptures with new eyes, and they are eager to hear more. They invite the stranger to share a meal with them. As he breaks the bread their eyes are opened and they recognise him.

Above all, this is a story about storytelling.

There are many levels of story going on.

Cleopas tells Jesus the story about what happened in Jerusalem.

Jesus tells them the story of the signs of the Messiah in the scriptures.

When they get back to Jerusalem, the disciples tell them the story about the appearance of Jesus to Simon (Peter).

The two tell the disciples the story of what happened on the road.
And all of this is told by Luke to the audiences of the Gospel story as a whole.

Bill Loader has this to say.

This story invites participation. The risen Jesus appears and just as suddenly disappears. We are not in the realm of a literal understanding of resurrection which would have Jesus brought back to life (like Lazarus) and living a normal life. It is not that Jesus was hiding behind the bushes and slipped in behind and then beside these two disciples while they were walking, with his face half veiled to avoid recognition. It was not that he slipped out the door later while they were not looking. Luke invites us to imagine something more mysterious: a materialising and dematerialising risen Jesus who makes appearances and then vanishes. This was consistent with how the early traditions understood Jesus' resurrection - and ours. It is the same person, embodied, but now transformed or transfigured into a new way of being and being embodied.

Keep this in mind as we explore the story further.

It's no wonder we assume the two travellers on the road were men. When the women reported to 'the eleven and all the rest' earlier in the day, that Jesus was risen, they were not believed.

...but these words seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe them...

The attitude of the disciples towards the women reflects both ancient and modern views towards the credibility of women's testimony. In ancient Israelite and modern Muslim law, it takes the testimony of two and sometimes three or four women to counter the testimony of one man.

We know, later that day, but before he appeared to the two travellers on the road to Emmaus, Jesus appeared to Peter. None of the Four Gospels record this meeting, but the disciples spoke of it. It appears they believed Peter!
I say no more!!!

As they walked, the travellers were talking and discussing the things that had happened in Jerusalem. The Greek implies that they were not only talking, they were 'examining evidence together' when Jesus joins them. But in their despair, when Jesus approaches them, they do not recognise him.

Note how surprised they are that their fellow traveller does not seem to know what has happened during the festival. The existence of this discourse may indicate that for Lukan communities some forty years later...many people knew of the crucifixion and death of Jesus... but like the two persons on the way to Emmaus, they did not know the meaning.

Richard Swanson highlights what he calls a ‘small, utterly ordinary verb in the imperfect tense’. The word in Greek is

hlpizomen (pronounced elpizomenwn) .

The NRSV translates this word as “we had hoped”.

The two disciples told Jesus

...we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel (Luke 24:21)

The walking disciples give voice to a discovery that every adult shares; very often, when it matters most, we find ourselves speaking of hope in the imperfect tense: *we had hoped...*

Tim Chester suggests it is not just individuals who are walking their own version of the Emmaus road.

“We had hoped,” our culture says.

Modernity was full of hopes, full of visions of progress.

The reality today is that there is a dark side to progress

- the endemic poverty
- the pollution of the planet
- the social fragmentation

The world says,

...we had hoped...

What is it we have hoped for?

The journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus was a journey of 7 kms which would take, maybe 4 hours to walk. Plenty of time, therefore, for Jesus to offer a new interpretation of the texts which they already knew. Or in other words, for them to see with new eyes, with eyes that were opened. The Good News to which our eyes are opened will be expressed in its own way by each new generation.

When the travellers arrive at Emmaus, Jesus makes as if to go on further, but the two disciples prevail upon him to stay with them and share a meal. Jesus agrees and goes in to share the evening meal with them. He was their guest but instead he assumes the position of host. He reaches out and takes the bread, blesses it and gives it to them. As he does so, the truth hits home. They recognise the gestures and words as the same that Jesus used, and they recognise this man for who he is: Jesus of Nazareth, the Risen Christ. This was Jesus of Nazareth in a form they had not recognised. But when they do, he vanishes from their sight.

It's cold and dark. The road is just as long. But these two lose no time in setting out immediately to return to Jerusalem to tell their friends. When they got back to Jerusalem, they find others telling their stories of seeing the risen Jesus.

In the main, the gospel stories are not there to prove the resurrection. The audience was already convinced. The gospel stories were there to explain the resurrection and its significance for living.

For Luke, to fulfil the hope of the resurrection is to tell the story of Jesus. Luke presents a church on the move and he presents the church on the move as the one which meets Jesus.

The church is on the road. It meets Jesus on the road. The two disciples are on a journey when they meet the unrecognised Jesus. But it is on the road, on a journey that they meet Jesus, the risen Lord. The Greek for 'on the road' is literally 'on the way.' The Christian way of living is to be on the road.

We know all about being "on the way". Manningham Uniting Church has been on the road for a long time. Don't think, just because we have moved into this lovely, exciting new building that we have arrived. We are still on the journey and now we have unlimited opportunities to witness to the community.

Everett Ferguson suggests,

...perhaps we in today's Christian church should pay close attention to Jesus' evangelical method...and use it in our everyday lives. To seize the opportunity when it arises.

Tim Chester tells it this way.

...we like to eat with people like us...

Many churches prepare and serve meals to hungry neighbours, but few church members find it easy to sit and eat with those who need the meal. Think how different the dynamic is if we sit and eat with someone. We meet as equals. We share together.

We have a wonderful opportunity, in the Redgum Café, to sit and talk to people, especially people we do not know.

The conclusion of the story is all about storytelling. The natural experience is to tell others. The mutual storytelling between the eleven and the two returned from Emmaus is a climax of the fulfilment of their hopes.

Tom Boomersshine sums it up this way.

You are witnesses.

You have seen it.

You have experienced it.

You are the witnesses of the story and of the experience that is present in the hearing and participation in the Gospel, the good news of Christ.

The story of what happened on the road to Emmaus is a story about hope re-ignited and a story of promise. We have not seen the risen Jesus, but we can know his presence in our lives.

This is the promise. Jesus said

I will be with you always.

AMEN