



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: Luke 24.13-35

Background to the reading

The story of Jesus' appearance on the road to Emmaus is the first of three resurrection appearances reported in Luke and is unique to his Gospel. The Greek text says they went to Emmaus which was 60 stadia from Jerusalem. "Sixty stadia" was about seven miles. We do not know the exact site of Luke's Emmaus. What we do know, is that there was more than one place in Palestine called Emmaus. They went on the same day as it was discovered that the tomb was empty.

Jewish travelers would not consider it unusual for a stranger, who is also a fellow Jew, to join their small company walking for some distance, especially if they assume him to be a Passover pilgrim on his way home.

News spread quickly by word of mouth, and public executions at a feast would be widely discussed. No matter where a Greek-speaking pilgrim visiting Jerusalem for the feast was from, he or she would probably have heard something about these matters.

Cleopas is a Hebrew/Aramaic name.

Cleopas's words reflect the confusion all Jesus' followers must have felt: Jesus was a prophet, as in the Old Testament, or maybe the Messiah; but the religious leaders of the nation, who of all people should have embraced and followed him, had rejected him. In Galilee and outside Palestine, where the priestly aristocracy was not as directly known as in Judea, respect for the temple leadership no doubt ran higher. Part of the reason for the apostles' unbelief is that a resurrection of this nature contradicted their messianic expectations; another reason may have been that Jewish officials considered the witness of women nearly worthless, because they regarded women as unstable and undependable.

Jesus surely includes references to Deuteronomy 18:15–18, Isaiah 9, 11 and 53; but the implication is that Jesus offered principles applying to his messiahship from throughout the Old Testament. Rabbinic literature regularly praised interpreters with the deep insight into Scripture that Jesus demonstrates here. "In all the Scriptures" means "Moses and all the Prophets since the Old Testament were divided into the Law, the Prophets and the Scriptures. The term "all" is another example of Luke's

fondness for exaggeration, for time would not have permitted Jesus to refer to “all” the Scriptures that referred to him.

It is polite for Jesus to make as if he would go on, unless they invited him to stay with them; such behaviour could also test a person’s hospitality. Hospitality demanded no less than the lodging these disciples offer Jesus, especially because it was approaching sundown; night travel, particularly as one got farther from Jerusalem, would be dangerous due to robbers. Jewish people throughout the ancient world welcomed fellow Jews who were traveling to spend the night, and insistence was part of hospitality.

Hospitality was a crucial obligation; the host must feed the traveller who has graced his or her home by coming to spend the night. It was also part of hospitality to offer bread to a guest, no matter how late in the evening. Although many homes would have used up their day’s bread by nightfall, in a small village people would know who still had bread left over. In modern villages of that region, bread might last for several days, but one must serve a guest a fresh, unbroken loaf as an act of hospitality. After the long walk, these disciples would be hungry anyway.

But by giving thanks and giving bread to them, Jesus takes the role usually held by the head of the household, which he had exercised among his disciples. This is a reminder of the last meal He had with them. It was only then that their eyes were opened and that they recognized him. Although it was late and dangerous to travel, they could not keep this big news that Jesus was indeed raised to themselves. They immediately left for Jerusalem, despite the fact that they were most probably tired and ready for their beds! What devoted witnesses they became!

This account provides an interpretative key for much of Luke’s theology, for a number of important theological emphases appear. It is the most important passage in the Gospel for understanding how Luke interpreted Jesus’ death.

On the human level Jesus’ death was caused by the Jewish leadership. Luke in fact went so far as to say the Jewish leadership crucified him. Yet Jesus’ death must be understood as ordained by God, for only through death could he enter his glory. Jesus’ death was therefore not a tragic accident but a divine necessity taught in Scripture. Jesus’ death was not the end, for the tomb was empty. The angels had declared that He lives. Two disciples on the Emmaus road had seen him, and so had Simon.

Sermon

The text verses for the sermon:

³⁰ *When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.* ³¹ *Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.* ³² *They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”*

I am sure we all know travelling fairly well. We know that usually when you travel that on the first day you are still pretty much occupied by your work, and your commitments, often not even recognizing beautiful scenery when you are driving.

Often we get to point B and wonder how we got there in the first place. It also happened with the two pilgrims travelling to Emmaus. They were pretty much occupied by the things that had happened recently in Jerusalem, without realizing and recognizing the risen Jesus.

But Jesus was travelling with them. He did explain to them things that they did not know before because they listened. They were open to hear the words of the stranger in their midst!

It reminds me of a song that Jim reeves sang: A stranger is just a friend you do not know! In this case the stranger was someone they heard about!

In the same way, God is traveling with us as we journey through life. He is with us through faith. He guides us through his Holy Spirit and Holy Word. He never ever leaves us alone. He is everywhere, taking care of us, showing us His love and compassion. He is a constant factor in our lives which no human can guarantee. If we listened to His voice, we will never get lost – something that we cannot say of modern day SATNAVs!

As we travel through life we often find ourselves worrying and asking: Where is God now? I think the same questions must have been going through the heads of the two men on the way to Emmaus. They wondered: Where is Jesus now? Is He really the messiah? Did He rise from the grave?

They got their answer when He shared with them bread. They realized that He was indeed with them. They felt the peace and could have joy in the hope of his resurrection. It was then that they realized everything they heard from Jesus while he was on earth was true; their sins are forgiven and death is no more. They felt the joy so intensely that they could not wait a single second to convey this important message. Their hearts were on fire and this fire could not be stopped...

The same is true for us. God often surprises us by the things He does and does not do. Sometimes He enters into our presence without us recognizing Him. He promised us that he will be present where two or three are gathered in His Name. Why don't we believe it anymore? Why do we still say: Where is God? Maybe the time has come, that when we do feel this way, to gather two or three believers and be convinced that God is with us through His Holy Spirit. Maybe if we do feel deserted and lost, we need to enter into His presence. And maybe we must look into our own hearts when we do not feel the presence of God. Life can cause our "hearts" or "*inner self*" to become cold, unresponsive and closed to any emotion or feeling. It is then that we must realize the advantage of having a brother or sister in faith close by to hold us, to be loving company to us and to share with us the love of God.

It reminds me of the poem "footprints" where the traveller moans when he sees only one set of footprints in the sand especially when he realises that it was during all the times that he struggled. It is then that God reminded Him that the one set of footprints belonged to him, because He was carrying the traveller!

God is faithful and true. He is always helping us, carrying us through all the difficult parts of our journeys. He gives us the strength and the hope to continue because we know this life is not our end or destiny. We are travellers on the way to the heavenly Jerusalem. He blesses us each and every moment of everyday when he surprises

us with his intervention of love, and mercy. I am sure you can think of many occasions where the Lord has surprised you with His loving intervention!

God is present not only in churches or special places. He is everywhere. He controls everything on this earth, the seasons, the sun and the moon. He is a faithful creator. He is a faithful travel companion. Great is His faithfulness! Hallelujah!
Amen!