

Luke 24 : 13 – 35 Road to Emmaus

Ever since I studied the history of painting in Higher Art at school, I have enjoyed going to art galleries and seeing for real the paintings that I have seen in books. My favourite artist is the Italian painter Caravaggio and my favourite painting of his is Supper at Emmaus. Jesus hands are outstretched as he gives thanks for the bread and the two travellers are suddenly amazed as they recognise him in that moment.

As with many paintings of this scene, the two travellers are shown as two men but scripture does not actually say that. There is a strong argument that Cleopas was travelling home with his wife. Mary, wife of Cleopas, is mentioned as one of the followers of Jesus at the crucifixion.

Cleopas and his companion certainly knew Jesus. They knew about the death of Jesus, they had seen him nailed to the cross, watched him die, saw the spear struck into his side, they were in no doubt that he had died.

Cleopas had seen miracles, healing, raising from the dead, listened to Jesus teaching

He had heard the women and some of the disciples say they had seen the risen Lord

But he hadn't quite got it, hadn't fully understood – they were confused, they did not believe that Christ was risen. They did not wait around in Jerusalem and were heading home.

Cleopas had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah, the one who would free his people Israel- but his hopes seemed to be dashed

Then Jesus himself is walking with them and they still don't recognise, don't understand, don't accept, don't open their hearts to him

He is beside them but they haven't found him – it is exactly the same today. Jesus is as present today as he was 2000 years ago but people do not know him.

The singer Steph McLeod grew up in Midlothian and in his teens went off the rails, turning to drugs and alcohol. Steph found himself homeless, found

Bethany in Edinburgh and eventually found Jesus. His first album has songs which tell the story of his life's journey. In one song he sings - when I found Jesus he was standing next to me, when I found Jesus he was holding on to me. Jesus was our companion on the road even before we knew he was there.

People can hear the word preached, maybe once, maybe for years, and still not grasp the message - it might be the best preaching in the world but it does not necessarily change hearts and minds.

Surely Jesus teaching on the road was the most sound teaching ever - even at 12 Jesus in the temple astounded the Jewish leaders with his wisdom and knowledge of scripture

What did Jesus speak of to Cleopas –

Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures they doubtless entered into a phase of their life in which they understood both the Scriptures and the Lord Himself differently. Before, much of the Word of God was a mystery.

From then on, when they would return to the book of Genesis and read about the seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head, they would know that the seed was Jesus. And thus, Genesis would be new for them.

And they would understand the Lord Himself better. They would read a bit further and find that He is not only the seed of the woman, He is the seed of Abraham also, the one who was to bring blessings to the nations. They would recognize the fulfillment of this prophecy in the subsequent proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles.

Cleopas would see Jesus prefigured in the life of Joseph.

In Exodus He would be perceived as the Passover lamb.

In Numbers he is the rock in the wilderness from whom we all receive the water of life freely. He is also the cloud who guides his people and covers them with his protection.

Deuteronomy pictures Jesus Christ as the righteous one, and it defines that righteousness.

In Joshua he is the captain of the Lord's hosts.

In Psalms and in the prophets we are told of his suffering, death, and resurrection. In some of them — Ezekiel, Daniel, and some others — we learn of his Second Coming in great power and glory.

The last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, portrays him as the Son of Righteousness risen with healing in His wings.

The two travellers later said that their hearts were burning when Jesus spoke to them on the road and opened the scriptures to them.

But still they did not recognise him.

It was in the breaking of the bread that they recognised him

They had heard all the wise words and teaching but it was not until he acted and broke the bread that Christ was recognised.

They had probably seen him give thanks and break bread many times. Did they recognize his mannerisms, was it the reverence in his voice as he spoke to God his Father. I would love to have seen Jesus give thanks and break bread.

Did Jesus simply choose to open their eyes at that point?

They probably did not know the ultimate significance of the bread blessed and broken - after all they had not been present at the Last Supper and it is unlikely that the disciples had yet spoken of it. They were still to discover the eternal mystery of Christ's body broken for them, Christ's blood shed for them in a new covenant between God and his children.

Christ, God's precious gift to a broken world. God gave us Christ and Christ gave us the Last Supper, the communion, the eucharist. Maybe it is a pity that our church does not use the word eucharist much nowadays because it is a wonderful word.

I have just finished reading an amazing book by Ann Voskamp called One Thousand Gifts – a dare to live fully right where you are.

She uses the word eucharist or eucharisteo throughout her book. Her book is about discovering the true meaning of eucharisteo.

She said in a recent interview - this is the word that can change everything: *eucharisteo*—it comes right out of the Gospel of Luke: “And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them...” (Luke 22:19 NIV). In the original language, “he gave thanks” reads “*eucharisteo*.”

The root word of *eucharisteo* is *charis*, meaning “grace.” Jesus took the bread and saw it as *grace* and gave thanks. He took the bread and knew it to be a *gift* and gave thanks. *Eucharisteo*, thanksgiving, envelopes the Greek word for grace, *charis*. But it also holds its derivative, the Greek word *chara*, meaning “joy.” *Charis*. Grace. *Eucharisteo*. Thanksgiving. *Chara*. Joy.

Deep *chara* joy is found only at the table of the *eucharist*, the table of thanksgiving. The holy grail of joy, God set it in the very centre of Christianity. If the cross is a central symbol of Christianity, so is the Eucharist. One of Christ’s very last directives He offers to His disciples is to take the bread, the wine, and to remember. *Do this in remembrance of Me*. Remember and give thanks.

This is the crux of Christianity: to remember and give thanks, *eucharisteo*.

Why? Why is remembering and giving thanks the core of the Christ-faith? *Because remembering with thanks is what causes us to trust; to really believe. Re-membering, giving thanks, is what makes us a member again of the body of Christ. Re-membering, giving thanks is what puts us back together again in this hurried, broken, fragmented world.*

Ann went on in her book to show us how we can give thanks every day for the gifts of God.

Her family suffered tragedy during her childhood. She grew up on a farm in the United States, one day her little sister ran out of the farm yard and was run over and killed by a truck. A deeply Christian family, the death of this child seemed to hang over them for ever. Ann grows up and marries and lives on her own farm with her husband and six sons.

And still the pain endures. She writes at the beginning of the book –

Can there be a good God? Where is God, really? How can he be good when babies die and marriages implode and dreams blow away, dust in the wind? Where is grace bestowed when cancer gnaws and loneliness aches and nameless places in us soundlessly die, break off without reason, erode away. Where hides the joy of the Lord, this God who fills the earth with good things and how do I fully live when life is full of hurt? How do I wake up to joy and grace and beauty and all that is the fullest life when I must stay numb to losses and crushed dreams and all that empties me out?

Ann was not in a good place – until a friend challenges her to write a list and her life changes for ever and certainly for the better. The friend challenges her to write a list of 1000 things she likes, 1000 blessings, 1000 gifts.

And she does that over the next months. In her ordinary life as a mother and farmer and writer, she begins to see beauty around her, to feel joy in simple things, to capture moments, snapshots that are precious – each one full of

God's grace and joy – eucharisteo = he gave thanks.

Faint aroma of cattle and straw

Wind flying cold wild in hair

Moonlight on pillows

Crackle of flames in the fireplace

Clean sheets smelling like wind

With a stack of dirty dishes in the sink she writes – bubbles, all colour in the sun – let's not feel fed up washing yet another pile of dirty dishes, let's look at the beauty of God's world in the colours of the bubbles – and give thanks.

Kettle whistling for tea on a cold afternoon

A toddler's blonde curls

What would be on your list?

Ann hoped that her future would be better but instead she discovered that her present, her here and now, was amazing. Each moment she was living in the grace and joy of God and the more she looked, the more she saw of God's gifts to her.

She got to 1000 gifts and she kept going.

And what could she give God in return? Well, one day she found herself in the Louvre in Paris, standing in front of Rembrandt's painting Supper at Emmaus. As she looks at Christ's hands breaking the bread, she is filled with thanksgiving and love for the Lord and she wants to feel complete union with him. She wrote –

This is what his love means – union. This is the one gift he longs for in return for all his unending gifts and this even I could give him and anywhere. Anywhere, in the kitchen scrubbing potatoes, in the arching cathedrals, in the spin of laundry and kids and washing toilets – anywhere I can have intimate communion with the Maker of Heaven and earth.

Remember the song we used to sing – a Fisher Folk song from the 70s –
Doing the dishes Lord, doing the dishes, living for your glory, doing the dishes

Add whatever – walking to school, washing the car, doing the shopping

We are called to do more than believe in God, we are called to live in God. To enter into Christ and Christ enter into us – to co-habit. This is why it is his will for us to always give thanks in all things – the unbroken communion.

How many times a day do we reach to embrace Christ in communion thanks? Seriously devout Jews today still give thanks to God 100 times a day, thanks for everything they touch, for everywhere they turn, for everyone they see. The thanks can be whispered or even silent, no-one but the holy spirit hears.

Ann stood in front of the painting of the supper at Emmaus and she reached out her hand towards the hands of Jesus, wanting to join in union with him, wanting to become one with him.

We can experience such union with Christ today as we come to his table and receive the gifts of bread and wine. May our eyes be open to see Christ in the breaking of the bread. May our hearts be open to receive Christ in the drinking of the wine. May we find grace and joy at the table of the Lord.

And perhaps we will go home and start our list of 1000 gifts – beginning with the breaking of bread and enjoying communion with Christ and the fellowship of our church family.

Thanks be to God.

Amen