

April 15th 2012 "A Walk To Remember" Luke 24:13-35

Of all the resurrection stories in the New Testament, I have always been fascinated most by the one we had read to us today. Two people—some even suggest that they were a married couple—travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus on that first Easter Sunday. Two followers of Jesus heading away from the centre of all the resurrection activity, even though the issue of what it all meant was still to be resolved.

To me they are rather like supporters at a footy match who leave before the final siren is blown, because they are certain that their team has lost. Only to hear much later on about the mighty final quarter turn around, that saw their team emerge triumphant.

These two disciples leave Jerusalem on that first Easter Sunday convinced that all is now over. A disaster has occurred—their leader is dead—he has failed and all is now finished. Yet all the time an amazing victory over death has been won, and they, as followers of Jesus, are sad without reason. They are cast down because they have yet to realize how powerful and mighty their Jesus really is.

But Jesus cares about these two travelers, which is a really encouraging thing for us to notice. For they are not two of the Apostles. They are not the ones that we might see as the important people!! By no means, for the inner circle of 12, with the exception of course of Judas the betrayer and of Thomas the doubter, are all back in the upper room in Jerusalem. No, these are just two of a group of other followers who tagged along with Jesus as often as they could. People who had come to believe in Jesus as someone who was special. As someone they could hitch their dreams and hopes to.

But now they are in a place of great doubt and despair, and Jesus comes and walks alongside them. Verses 14 and 15 tell us :-

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;

We can easily imagine their conversation. How it would have jumped from one thing to another. This miracle that really moved one of them or this word that the other had heard Jesus proclaim with such authority. The experiences that they recalled with a mixture of joy and sadness, and the whole pain and agony of the betrayal, unjust trial, and shocking crucifixion.

"How could it ever have happened to someone like Jesus", one would say. "How could God sit back and let them do it when all Jesus ever cared about was helping others?" And the other would sadly shake their head and say, "I don't know."

They would have talked of their hopes and their dreams. Of the absolutely unexpected stories that the women who went first to the tomb had told, and then, the unexplainable absence of a body when Peter and John went to investigate.

These two people were in the saddest and darkest place emotionally that we could ever envisage, and verse 15 tells us that Jesus Himself came up and walked along with them.

What an incredible statement. Jesus Himself came. He didn't send an angel or another special messenger. He came into their place of emotional darkness and walked with them.

I don't know whether you have ever experienced something like that but I know I have. Times I can look back on when I have been at my lowest, or been facing a most difficult situation, and I have sensed the presence of Jesus standing alongside me. I have not seen Him with my eyes but I have known that He was there.

Some of you may know the story that Arty Commys tells. She had not completely discovered Jesus as her Saviour, but was well on the way to doing so, when she was taken into hospital and diagnosed with a serious health issue. During the next two days she was in a critical situation and there were fears for her survival. And when I saw her afterwards she expressed with joy and amazement how she saw Jesus there with her in the hospital. When she needed Him most He was there. Is it any wonder that she became a Christian?

So Jesus was there with those two disciples on the Emmaus Road. They had left Jerusalem and all the rumours of a risen Jesus behind them, but now Jesus Himself, in His resurrected state, chooses to join them on their journey. There is no doubt that this has all the ingredients to be A Walk To Remember, except for one thing. Verse 16 goes on to say:-

but they were kept from recognizing him.

Surely we can see the irony of this situation. They had left Jerusalem, it would at least partly seem, because they didn't believe what the women had said about Jesus being alive. If they had believed the women's testimony then there was no way they would have left Jerusalem. Now their Risen Lord walks alongside them, but they are kept from recognizing Him.

Have you ever wondered why that was so?

The answer is simple. These two people needed to hear from God about all the things they were struggling with. They needed to see the answers that God had already given to their questions in His Word. They needed their hearts to burn within them with belief, not because of what they saw of the physical Jesus, but because of the faith generated in them by the Divine unpacking of the Old Testament Scriptures.

And the first thing they needed was to be re-assured about who Jesus was.

It's quite likely that they had been followers of Jesus for some time. They no doubt, had made many personal sacrifices in order to be close to Him, because they believed that He was the chosen One of God. The One who would redeem Israel. Yet they had seen their own Jewish leaders hand Him over to the Romans to be crucified.

Now they no longer talk about Him as the Messiah but refer to Him in v19 as Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God. The trust they had in this Jesus to save them, and their Nation, had diminished to the point where they were ready to let it go completely.

Maybe you can sympathize with them this morning as you look back on times in your life, when circumstances or situations caused your trust in

Jesus to waver. Things may not have gone as you had hoped, and you began to wonder whether Jesus was really there for you.

Or perhaps you yourself have never been in that position but know of others who have or who are. Look again at how Jesus responds to them in v25:-

²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

He doesn't waste time pampering their anxieties and fears. But emphasizes that Jesus is not now 'just a mighty prophet' because He was crucified, but is still very much the Christ or Messiah that they had hoped for. That the suffering was all part of the plan that God had previously outlined through the prophets and was in fact the pathway to His position in Glory. A position where He will be a much greater force for them and their Nation than they could ever imagine.

And Jesus still does the same today for those who begin to waver in their trust. He comes alongside them through the Scriptures and reveals that He is still on His throne. He is still looking after His own whatever circumstances seem to suggest. And we can trust Him to bring us through our darkest moments, even death itself, for He has already won the victory.

In the midst of our greatest dread He is still there with us. He brings to mind a scripture that we didn't even realize that we knew. Or we read a verse by chance in the Bible, or we see it on a sign or hear it from someone else. And deep down we know that it is Jesus who has orchestrated this reminder of who He truly is, simply because he loves us.

The second thing was that they needed their dreams repaired. "But we had hoped they said in v21, **that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel** and we can feel their weariness, despair, and confusion.

Have you ever had your major dreams shattered and felt deep in your heart that somehow God had let you down. You had it worked out in your mind how things would pan out, and you were so sure that God had truly led you up to that point, and then 'bang', it all fell apart in a moment.

That's how these two were feeling. They just couldn't understand how things had gone so wrong so quickly. The added confusion of the resurrection rumours hadn't helped either. They had put their own

interpretation on what the life of Jesus would produce—A Mighty Deliverer for Israel. And when that life was tragically ended they couldn't at first accept that God's plans may well be different to theirs.

And that's what Jesus showed them from the Scriptures. He opened their hearts to realize that God's plans were greater than their limited understanding. That their shattered dreams were still intact, but were just different and so much better than they could ever have thought possible.

So don't give up on those shattered dreams. Simply be still and allow Jesus, as he walks alongside you, to open your heart gradually to the wonder of what he has in store for you. And maybe He is even now whispering into your consciousness the words of Jeremiah 23:11

For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Then third, Jesus used that time and the Scriptures, to light a fire in their hearts. After Jesus had revealed Himself to them through the breaking of bread, and then disappeared from their sight, they turned to each other and said in v32:-

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Their darkest experience ever, left them with their greatest memory ever, of the inner fire that God's word can produce when God speaks through it to our hearts. And how true it is that sometimes it takes a dark night of the soul, for God's Word to truly come alight for us.

One of the choruses we sometimes sing is "Shine Jesus Shine", and as I was looking at this Emmaus Road story I began to think that the writer of that song had this story in mind. Particularly the chorus that says:—

***Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word Lord, and let there be light.***

The importance of God's Word in this account from Luke 24 cannot be over emphasized. When we set out to study it by the power of the Holy Spirit then God will open up its treasures to us. He will give us those moments when our hearts will explode with joy at the promises that suddenly become

so clear and pertinent to us. Jesus gave those two followers time to discover the richness of what it says about Him before they saw Him face to face in His risen glory, and their hearts burned within them.

He promises to do the same for us. That's why we must commit to reading His Word. To studying it with others. To memorizing it if we are able. To reading what others have written about it and hearing sermons that are Biblical based. For then we can be assured that in our darkest times and in our joyous times, Jesus will walk alongside us, delighting to bring those words back into our consciousness when we need them most. Preparing us for that wonderful day when we too, will finally see Him face to face.