

TFTD 25.41 Easter Sunday April 20th The Road to Emmaus: Luke 24.13-36



Luke's Gospel closes with one of my favourite Easter stories. Well over half the gospel, as we have seen, is taken up with Jesus' 'Journey to Jerusalem.' Right from ch.9 (9.51), he is travelling the long and winding road to Jerusalem, peppered with encounters and conversations, but always moving steadily forward to the 'Exodus' that has to be accomplished in Jerusalem (9.31). Now, that Exodus is accomplished: the strife is o'er, the battle won — but it isn't the end of the journey. For Jesus' disciples, the road now leads away from Jerusalem — and the journey is just beginning.

It begins with a rumour. At the centre of all the Easter stories is the empty tomb, and the message of the angels: He is not here: he is risen (Mk 16.6). You're looking in the wrong place: Why do you seek the living among the dead? (Lk 24.5). A rumour of angels, spreading out in concentric circles — first to the women who went to the tomb in the early morning, then to the male disciples— who dismissed it as 'an idle tale' (Luke 24.10-11). To Cleopas and his companion, it's just a rumour — just an empty space filled with uncertainty (vv.22-24). Just another confusion to add to the confusions and rumours of that traumatic day. They aren't even part of the inner circle of Jesus' followers, they have no idea what's going on. They're walking away from disaster, on a journey of grief, a journey of all the might-have-beens: We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel (v.21).

And it's on this lonely journey that the mysterious stranger draws alongside, draws them into conversation, teases the story out of them: Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn't know what's been happening over these last few days? Go on, he says, tell me. And then, as

they walk, they find he's expounding the scriptures to them, getting them to re-read the old familiar promises in a new way, helping them to see that maybe, just maybe, what happened to Jesus was not the failure of all the promises but their fulfilment, helping them to realise that God's plan of redemption might be bigger and deeper than they had ever imagined ...

And then, they're inviting him in to share a meal (well, you can't leave a stranger out on the road at nightfall). And something about those familiar actions — taking bread, giving thanks over it, breaking, and sharing — something jerks their minds away from the old, fruitless cycle of regrets and might-have-beens, makes them focus instead on the living presence of Jesus in front of them. And instead of wandering off into the distance, they realize that here, now, is where Jesus is (even though they can't see him any more) — and the living presence of Jesus suddenly illuminates that dark and dreary journey ('Didn't our hearts burn within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?') — and they realize, "It was Him!". He was with us all the time — he was with us on the journey, even though we didn't realize He was there. And that realization draws them back to Jerusalem, back to meet up with Jesus' friends, to share what has happened — to be met by a babble of excited voices, "He was here! He appeared to Simon!" — and then, Jesus himself is standing among them, speaking familiar words of peace. And the nightmare is over.

This is the mystery at the heart of Christ's pilgrim people, the secret of Easter. Not the eggs, not the chocolate, but the living presence of Christ — on the lonely journey, in the privacy of home, wherever two or three are gathered in my name — "There am I in the midst of you." A living presence, crystallized, in some mysterious way, in those familiar actions of taking bread and wine, blessing, breaking, and sharing. "Do this," he said, "in remembrance of me" — and we do it, because he told us to.

It's an act of memory — a memorial of something that happened a long time ago. But it's more than that — because he also said, "This is my Body, given for you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood" — a new relationship with God, based on grace and forgiveness (Luke 22.19-20). A relationship that will last to eternity, based on the work that Jesus accomplished on the cross. Not just a memory but a living presence, shedding his light backwards into the lonely journeys of grief, the fruitless cycles of might-have-beens — and drawing us forward into a new future, a new journey, sending us out to do his work of loving, sustaining, reconciling, living in his Easter world. Alleluia!

Lord Jesus, stand among in your risen power, and make yourself known to us in the breaking of the bread. Amen.

God bless — and happy Easter!

From Loveday and all the TFTD team.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed, alleluia!



Luke 24.13-36

The Walk to Emmaus

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’

Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’

That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed, alleluia!

