

# Core Business in Disrupted Times

## Road to Emmaus Luke 24:13-35

April 2020

Easter 3

### Luke 24:13-35

#### *Jesus encountered on the Road to Emmaus*

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 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?" 19 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, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 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. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 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. 24 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." 25 Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 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. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 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?" 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

### Message

Core Business:

Word & Table

### Introduction:

A theologian of the modern era named Karl Barth gave this advice to preachers: "Preach using the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other."



This becomes all the more important when the world is disrupted, in turmoil, crisis or dramatic change. We may well be at the beginning of such an episode as the Covid-19 Pandemic disrupts almost everything.

**Q** Why do we read the newspaper?

**A** Because we want to know what is happening around us. For two months the 'newspapers' have been full of the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic - both locally and globally.

**Q** Why read the Bible at such times?

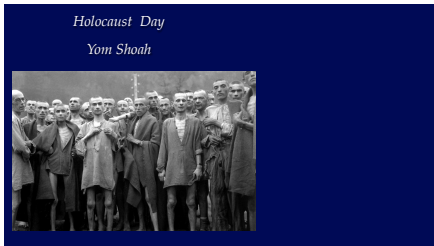
A Psalm 119.130 says it well.

The unfolding of your words gives light;  
it imparts understanding to the simple.

Psalm 119.130

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*Prayer: Lord, I pray that I may unfold your word this morning to give light in this season.*



Last Monday evening was the beginning of *Yom Shoah*, or Holocaust Remembrance Day. One Holocaust survivor who wrote much about that experience was Elie Wiesel. What I learned from him was that in the grim situation of the Auschwitz barracks, when people were more dead than alive, many Jewish people grappled with their faith.

The barracks of Auschwitz were no place to debate the price of fish, or fly a business plan or even consider what the future might be. When reality is all past and present with no sense of future what do you talk about?

I recall seeing in the film about Corry ten Boom -The Hiding Place- two interned women giving their full energies to discussing how a piece of Beethoven should be played. This was in their soul and so they went there.

In other such settings -with black smoke rising from nearby crematoria- inmates debated what the Hebrew Scriptures meant in light of their horrific experience – The Book of Job was studied. Elie Wiesel tells how in one instance a court was convened in the barracks to put God on trial for faithlessness to the Jewish People. After many sessions of deliberation, God was found guilty. The verdict was announced and followed with evening prayer.

**My point is this:** In times of great distress, people of faith search the scriptures to ground and test their faith because we need to live and hope based on God's word. When the news around us is very dark we seek the light of God's Word as found in the scriptures.

The soul needs more than teddy bears and the value of solidarity (*samen staan wij sterk* etc) even if it involves holding hands and singing Kumbaya!

### **Text**

On the evening following the first resurrection sightings Jesus came to lead two people in just this sort of process – Bible study amidst horror and despair. One of them was named Cleopas. The other is not named, may have been a man or may have been Cleopas' wife named 'Mary' who John mentions as present at the crucifixion 3 days earlier.<sup>1</sup>

This is a beautiful story of a real event that has a few things to teach us.

<sup>1</sup> John 19.25 ...but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

- How do you read the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other?
- How might you recognize Jesus as alive in our circumstances?
- What might this story teach us about being Trinity Church today amidst the global disruption and crisis?

So Cleopas and companion are walking away from Jerusalem after a shattering weekend. They had been in the city during the Passover and were now leaving. They were not happy. They hoped to make 7 miles /11.5 km away from it all. If walking well in the cool of the day it would be a good two hours.

Their heads were full of what the weekend newspapers would have published. They had seen Jesus come and make a big impact in Jerusalem. They saw in him a prophet mighty in Word and deed, so clearly from God. They had also seen how their own national faith leaders had snuffed him out by handing him over to the Romans for crucifixion. So many hopes had been attached to Jesus but it all ended with the brutal crucifixion - which they may well have witnessed. That was enough gut-wrenching trauma and disappointment for one weekend!

But no wait, there's more! Then beyond what was public knowledge and newspaper copy came reports from some women in their circle saying that the tomb was empty and angels told them that Jesus was alive. I would not be surprised if at this point Cleopas or the other said, "Let's get out of here. We have seen enough and its best we leave."

This was the great disruption they were talking through when Jesus pulled along side on the road.

I love what happens next and how it happens.

Jesus joins them on their road as they discuss what the newspapers would have covered of the weekend. There are two of them and one of him so he is perhaps not seen as a threat when he gets close enough to ask: "What are you talking about?"

How interesting! I wonder if the energy of their conversation stood out but it's still curious to bowl up to people and ask, "What are you talking about?" Their immediate response is remarkable: They stood still and looked sad.

They were so deep into the newspaper level of processing the weekend that they did not really take in who this person was edging into their conversation. It was Cleopas who answered him,

"Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"

Jesus asked them,

"What things?"

"What things?" asks Jesus in blue-eyed innocence! What things? Indeed!  
Never underestimate the value of a simple question.

The result is that Cleopas and partner spill out their version of events, as might be told in the media –because apparently, their new companion did not know.

At this point on the road, Jesus brings the Bible -that is the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament- alongside the fresh newspaper type account. Listen to how diplomatically and gently he does this: - in v.25.

<sup>25</sup> Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!

In schoolboy idiom this sounds like: ‘Der! How could you be so thick?’

From the way that they tell the news of the day, Jesus judges they do not know the words of God recognized in the Prophets of Israel as recorded in the scriptures. “You are foolish and slow of heart to believe.”

Can’t even join a few dots on this?

The newspapers will tell you a version of what happened. They will not tell you what it means or how it relates to God’s wider narrative. If you live with reference to God, you need God to tell you what it all means and if you actually understood the scriptures you would.

<sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

<sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

Something I often encounter in Christians is some embarrassment over Bible ignorance. We could dress this up as ‘low biblical literacy’. In the engagement between newspaper and Scriptures there is a clear preference among many to discuss newspaper. The preacher can speak about the Bible and we might dip into it in study groups but it remains a perplexing book for most while the newspaper is easy reading.

So diplomat Jesus goes from:

- 1) What are you two talking about? - which gets a sad response.  
to,
- 2) How foolish and slow of heart you are to not consider this in light of what the Prophets said,  
to,
- 3) Here is a survey just for you of the entire prophetic tradition from Moses onwards found in the scriptures that throws light on the events you have described and specifically on me. I suspect Cleopas and companion knew not to interrupt!

All the while they did not recognize him as the risen Jesus.

If we fast forward to later in the story and they remember what they experienced at this time: v.32  
There was some heart disconnect as they did not register what they were feeling.

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

Only then did they become aware of what they had been experiencing before.

This is why scripture is central to Jews and Christians.

We need the words of God to make heaven’s sense of what is happening in the world, especially where Jesus may be in it all.

The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. Ps. 119.130

That is why we prioritize opening the scriptures whenever we meet – even at the risk of being boring.

Covid-19 need not stop that.

- We can read the scriptures together.

- They can be opened to speak into today.
- They can give meaning to the newspaper.

That applies to our cell groups as well. By all means share your lives, discuss the newspaper but we need to open the scriptures to seek God's light on the story we live.

I wonder if we need people to be a bit more like Jesus is in this story in asking?

- What are we talking about?

and

- What do the Scriptures say about this?

This is of course basic theological reflection.

It is so necessary because the newspaper in whatever form will never tell you what the day's events mean with reference to God. They will never tell you what plagues mean in the purposes of God. They will give information without meaning.

In times of crisis and confusion God's people dig deeper into God's word to hear God so light shines in whatever circumstances. We do need to lift our noses out of the newspaper type media and search the scriptures as our core business.

Before I got into this application, darkness was falling on the road and the group of three consulted about staying together for the night in shared accommodation. The scripture records this place as Emmaus but archeology has yet to locate where this was.

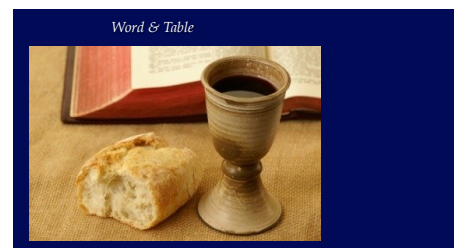
- It had been a very rough few days.
- That early evening had been a heart red hot Bible study with a new acquaintance on the road out of Jerusalem.
- It was now time to unwind and relax at table until, their guest does something...

... he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

This was Jesus enacting the instructions he had given for bread: to be taken, blessed, broken and given to represent and remember in the Jewish manner what he enacted in his crucifixion sacrifice. It's as if Jesus used dramatic code to say, this is me: bread taken, blessed, broken and given.

Then they got it! They got it totally beyond all the reasons and instincts why they had not thus far. This was Jesus, and he was gone!

In that moment it all clicked and they remembered the Bible study from back on the road: Did our hearts not burn within us? When God's word is allowed to shine that is what happens.



Then when we live the life Jesus instructed, including the sacraments of the Lord, we see, we recognize, we get it in some way.

I often saw that happening in our practice of Holy Communion and I miss it badly. This corporate participation in the table of the Lord is a casualty of lockdown. An on-screen performance will not do it.

**Conclusion:**

This experience of the Risen Jesus on the road provides a basic model for what our meetings and life together should contain.

- A. It's life on the road yet opening God's word to brings God's light to the journalism of our time.
- B. Seeing the Lord in our life together as he commands.

With Table Fellowship and Holy Communion not being possible we need to make what we can of opportunities to open God's word in the scriptures. Seek God's vision on what is and what is happening. Seek him together as you walk the roads you walk.

And understand that of all the things we do as church. These things are essential. These are the core conversations to have.