

Luke 24:13-35

The journey of faith and the journey through life are inexplicably intertwined. The Lord meets us where we are, sometimes recognised, but often not. Strangers cross our paths offering an opportunity to give and receive the love of God. Books we read highlight Christian morals, ethics and principles (or the absence of them), whether devotional, academic or novel in genre. Conversations with other people develop our understanding of each other and the world around us; what builds us up and what brings us down. Things we see, whether on television, films or adverts, influence what we believe. All of these encounters affect our life choices and behaviour. The choice and behaviour of the two people travelling to Emmaus demonstrates how wrong we can be when we forget the promises of Scripture, especially in the midst of negative experiences.

Luke 24:13-35 *The Road to Emmaus*

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognising Him.

The appearance of Jesus to these two people on the road to Emmaus is the first recorded in Luke. It happens only three days after the crucifixion, and on the same day that Jesus has risen. The Greek translates these travellers as ‘two of Jesus’ followers’ yet whether they were men or women or one of each the narrative does not say. We do know that both of them missed the significance of history’s greatest event because they were so immersed in their own disappointments and too engrossed in their own interpretation of events. Their morose navel-gazing left no room for God; no stillness in their thoughts for the inspiration of His Holy Spirit. As a result they set out in the *wrong direction*, away from the communion and support of other believers in Jerusalem, just when they needed it most! It is all too easy to become immersed in our own disappointments and engrossed in our own way of thinking, often to the exclusion of everything else. As a consequence, these two disciples did not even recognise Jesus walking and talking beside them! It is hard to comprehend such blindness in those who had experienced Jesus in the flesh. But such are the consequences of believing in ourselves instead of trusting the Word of God and teaching of the Lord. When things seem to go from bad to worse, turn out very different from our own expectations and total failure appears inevitable, stop! Such dire times are just the moments on our life journey to lay aside all morose navel-gazing and defeatist speculation and instead make room for God. By stilling our thoughts in openness to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit we can, by faith, set out in the *right direction* in the hope of dispelling our blindness and recognising Jesus walking and talking beside us.

Luke 24:13-35 *continued...*

¹⁷And He said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then 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?” ¹⁹He 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, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed Him over to be condemned to death and crucified Him. ²¹But 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. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and

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. ²⁴Some 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.”

The two travellers were obviously still in shock from witnessing the barbaric death of Jesus. I have often wondered if people of those times suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome or whether crucifixion was such a commonplace event that people became desensitised to it? The events of the past few days would have gained the interest of the whole nation, because the city would have been bursting at the seams with Jewish pilgrims from all over the Roman Empire, there to observe the week-long celebration of Passover. Therefore the two disciples would have been surprised, and perhaps a little irritated, at the strangers apparent ignorance of recent events. They had pinned all their hopes on their own pre-conceived ideas as to how the Messiah would deliver Israel, believing He would use political and military means. Furthermore, they seem confused by the report of the women that His body was missing and unable to accept the statement that Jesus is alive. All their grief, confusion and disbelief had rendered them spiritually blind, and deaf, to the person of Jesus and the Truth of His words. Many psychological tests have shown that we only see what we are looking for; our expectation dictates where our focus is placed. These two were not expecting to ‘see’ Jesus; their expectation of His presence was non-existent. Yet God is ever gracious in opening our eyes with patient care, often in the most unexpected ways. Jesus is always beside us and the Holy Spirit ever ready to reveal Truth.

Luke 24:13-35 *continued...*

²⁵Then He said to them, “Oh how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into His glory?” ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them the things about Himself in all the Scriptures. ²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, He walked ahead as if He were going on. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰When He was at the table with them, He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised Him; and He vanished from their sight.

Jesus calls these two ‘foolish’ because they knew the Scriptures, they knew the tomb was empty and Jesus had explained what would happen before the event. But despite all the prophetic and physical evidence, together with the witness of the women, their eyes were still closed, perhaps their hearts too? They chose to trust in their own understanding and the world’s standards of political power and military might. Their hope of God’s Kingdom come, with its reversed standards and values, had disappeared from view.

Life grows out of death; our sinful nature must die in order for us to be reborn; the old ways of behaving must be cast off in order to adopt Christ-like thinking and behaviour. These two still didn’t recognise Jesus, even though His explanation of scripture lifted their spirits within them; they were stuck in the material world. It was only when they sat down to share a meal with Him, and He blessed the food and broke the bread, the penny finally dropped! Jesus must have a special way of giving thanks to His Father and blessing bread, for this is not the only instance of recognition of our Lord. Sharing meals with both friends and strangers was important to Jesus and He often used such times of relaxation to teach. Sharing meals with others is still an important part of Christian communion. Relaxing in each other’s company gives opportunity to thank God together for His providence, not just for food, and remember the magnitude of the gift Jesus has blessed us with.

Luke 24:13-35 *continued...*

³²They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us?" ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and He has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how He had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Once Jesus' presence has been recognised He disappears! That is because once we realise the power in the gift of His love we will '*know*' for certain. Our doubts change into belief and faith is born through trust in what we now know. Our perspective changes from self to others; we share because we know in sharing we encourage and strengthen each other into ONE body, ONE church, ONE community of God's people, a beacon of hope to all. Scripture is all about the balance of God's relationship with His people. God reveals His risen Son to both male and female enabling a wholeness of representation to those who believe and those to whom they witness their faith experiences. God repairs the fractures of the community of all His people, there is no favouritism or bias. God's authority and love rests on all who seek, believe, and follow His Son. This is where our power comes from; this is where our victory lay, seeking Jesus as we walk along the road of life, right beside us and in our midst. If we believe this, we become parts of Christ's body and follow what we discern as God's will and purpose together. This is how we will find the path of Truth, justice and righteousness that Jesus walks, and where we are sure to find Him. However, if we act on our own, without reference to God's Word and Christ's body, then we are no more than fractured splinters. I'm sure that we have all experienced how much pain the tiniest of splinters can cause and the difficulty in removing them.

As we continue cooperating with government lockdown in such disturbing times, let us remember God's promises in Scripture. If we expect to see Him in our journey of faith and life, then we will! We may be worried about ourselves or loved ones catching coronavirus or concerned for those suffering with it or perhaps grieving over those who have died from it. Whatever our situation, let us continue to pray and stand in faith on the Word of God to bring us through this trial together. Satan is jealous and bitter; he will try every trick in the book to demoralise and destroy the human race just because God made us and delights in us, but his days are numbered. Be assured that Jesus never leaves us alone and we will never be abandoned for God knows every soul and gives strength to overcome to all who seek Him.

Song: *For a modern version of the following hymn, look for:*

(It is Well With My Soul) *by:* Stuart Townend & Phil Baggaley

When Peace Like a River – *By* Horatio Spafford-1873-*composer* Philip Bliss

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my loss, Thou hast taught me to know,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Refrain:

*It is well, with my soul,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

Refrain:

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Refrain:

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

Refrain:

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!

Refrain:

And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

Refrain:

This hymn was written after traumatic events in Horatio Spafford's life. The first was the death of his son at the age of 2 and the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, which ruined him financially (he had been a successful lawyer and had invested significantly in property in the area of Chicago that was extensively damaged by the great fire). His business interests were further hit by the economic downturn of 1873, at which time he had planned to travel to Europe with his family on the *SS Ville du Havre*. In a late change of plan, he sent the family ahead while he was delayed on business concerning zoning problems following the Great Chicago Fire. While crossing the Atlantic, the ship sank rapidly after a collision with a sea vessel, the *Loch Earn*, and all four of Spafford's daughters died. His wife Anna survived and sent him the now famous telegram, "Saved alone...". Shortly afterwards, as Spafford traveled to meet his grieving wife, he was inspired to write these words as his ship passed near where his daughters had died. Philip Bliss called his tune *Ville du Havre*, from the name of the stricken vessel.

Poem: FAITH! ©Janice Morgan 2016

Faith! A word that's illusive in meaning
It ebbs and flows in our logic of believing
Included in songs of worship and praise
When prayers of conviction and devotion we raise
Faith fills our hearts with assurance and joy
To manifest confidence is its central ploy
The prayer of faith is the way to be blessed
When all manner of sins to our Lord are confessed
The sick are healed; the guilty forgiven
The bond of reliance on God never riven
The prayer of the righteous is based on trust
Christ's suffering and death reveals Truth to the just
To pray for each other in faith and love

Invites the power of God's Spiritual dove
Who indwells our soul most mysteriously
With divine words of wisdom most seriously
God's people are anointed with His name
Absolved from the guilt of all sins and all blame
For faith is the gold; the bronze and silver
Of every hope of every believer.