

Sermon for Online Service: Pott Shrigley 26 April 2020

Luke 24.13-35 The Road to Emmaus

The account we heard just now of the two friends meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus would make a great screenplay.

Dramatic tension is built into the story; as the friends walk along, away from Jerusalem, they are joined by a stranger: we know, but they don't, that the stranger is none other than Jesus himself, who that very day has risen from the dead. So the big question in our minds is, 'When will we have the big reveal? When will he make himself known to them?'

And, of course, that dramatic climax finally takes place that evening as they sit round the supper table, and they suddenly know him as he breaks the bread for their meal. And what a moment it is: that joyful re-union with the Lord and Friend whom they had thought was dead and gone for ever.

But Luke, who wrote this account, wasn't writing a screenplay: and Jesus wasn't motivated by the wish to achieve dramatic effect, either. So, then, why? Why didn't he reveal himself as soon as he met them on the road: 'Hi fellas! It's me! Everything's OK! The nightmare is over!' Why did he keep them waiting until the evening to bring an end to their anguish and loss?

And this matters, because there is something happening here which has been repeated countless times since. Just as, at that supper table, there is the joyous encounter with the risen Lord; so, ever since, people have been meeting with Jesus, have, like Cleopas and his friend, finally recognised that it is *he* who has been with them all along on their journey; that he *is* alive, that he *is* with them, and that therefore there *is* hope, there *is* peace, there *is* meaning. It's not only 1st century but also 21st century people who can have a real encounter with the risen Lord.

So what does this story tell us about that encounter?

Well, it tells us that Jesus meets us where we are. He does this literally with these two friends of course – he comes and joins them on their 7-mile walk to Emmaus. But he also meets them where they are in their journey of grief, shock and pain. He knows that they will not be able to accept straight away that it is he who is with them. There is unfinished business in their broken hearts, and so, like any sensitive person, Jesus first just listens. Twice he asks those 'open' questions; questions which give a person permission to unburden themselves to a listening ear.

And the floodgates open. It must have felt good to tell this sensitive, listening stranger all that was pent up in their hearts following the horrors of Jesus betrayal, trial, torture and death.

That is what they need at that moment, and so that is where Jesus meets them. I wonder, what is the point of need in your life where Jesus wants to meet with you?

Notice too where he takes them next. Just as their broken *hearts* start to heal, so Jesus now brings clarity and understanding to their confused and scrambled *minds*. He turns the conversation round to the scriptures, which, as faithful Jews they already know well, and re-shapes their concept of what has taken place: far from being a terrible calamity, he says, his death was all there in the scriptures: all part of God's plan.

How often I have found that just turning to the scriptures, just opening the Bible and reading it, puts things in the right perspective – because it gives me God's perspective. I hope you have too.

And so, when they arrive at the house in Emmaus – and persuade this stranger to stay there for the night– the scene is set for that dramatic climax.

But even here it doesn't go according to *my* idea for the screenplay – the predicted happy ending. They finally recognise him, yes: but what follows? A joyous re-union; hugs and back-slapping? Drinking and talking and laughing together late into the night? No. Jesus goes. He leaves. Luke says, 'He vanished from their sight'.

You see, this is not a happy ending – because it's not an ending at all. It's a Beginning. A new story is about to be written. A story of lives – of a world – transformed by the power and love of the risen Lord. And the exciting thing for these two is that they – healed, restored, renewed by Jesus as they are – are going to be part of that story.

You can be, too.