

4th May 2014 – Third Sunday of Easter – 9 & 10.30am Wesley

Theme: 'Journeying with the risen Lord'

Reading: Luke 24: 13-35 'The Emmaus Road experience'

Text: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" vs 32

Prayer for Illumination

Lord, you opened the meaning of the Scriptures to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus and set their hearts ablaze. By the power of your Spirit kindle our hearts as we hear your word proclaimed, that we may receive you with joy also this day. Amen.

Introduction

For me, this is one of the most meaningful passages of Scripture because it talks about ordinary followers of Jesus going about their daily duties, simply travelling from the city of Jerusalem back the eleven kilometres to the village of Emmaus, and on the way the risen Jesus comes and joins their journeying. It is only when they break bread together in the evening that 'their eyes were opened and they recognized him.'

Bruce Prewer writes a paraphrase of this passage simply titled 'Emmaus'.

"We walked into the sunset brooding our deep loss, sure that the best days of our lives lay dead behind us.

We talked around the rumours spread by our small group, but feared to embrace the good news lest it be false hope.

A stranger then overtook us, travelling our road, he unfolded the truths and loves our grief had betrayed.

Our hearts tremble within us for the faith we'd lost, we reached an inn at sundown wanting to break fast.

We sat at table together to share cheese and bread, he took up the loaf and broke it and out danced the dead!"

Beyond Words (p62) Bruce Prewer

This describes the amazing 'breaking into' their lives of the risen Jesus in a way that we cannot fully understand with rational thinking yet experientially there is no doubt that these two disciples encountered their risen Lord in a real, personal transformational way that so many later have also experienced.

The Passage – Luke 24:13-35

Let us take a few moments to reflect on the passage from Luke 24.

Here we have another encounter with Jesus, but this is different. It is a post resurrection appearance that sits alongside other accounts in the Gospels. However, only in Mark 16:12-13 is this Emmaus Road encounter briefly mentioned. In Luke it is a central resurrection story and one that many people find resonates with aspects of their own faith journeying.

The two followers of Jesus walking the road are Cleopas and another un-named follower. There is a wonderful structure to the unveiling of Jesus with them.

There are seven points that easily come out as we look at this section of scripture.

1. 'Jesus came up and walked along with them but they were kept from recognizing him'. (vss 15b/16) I love the imagery of Jesus walking with them but initially unrecognized.
2. Secondly, Jesus asks an open question: 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?' This enables Cleopas to begin to open up about Jesus and the sadness they have experienced and this goes further as Jesus simply says 'What things?' which leads Cleopas to sharing further.

3. This then opens the way for Jesus to affirm and teach them the 'good news' of the promised Christ that he must initially suffer before 'entering his glory'. Jesus teaches them using the prophets of old.
4. There is the invitation of the followers, still not having recognized who Jesus is, to stay with them.
5. A meal is shared together and it is in prayer as Jesus breaks the bread that the followers' eyes are opened as to who he is.
6. Jesus vanishes at that point but the followers have experienced the presence of their Lord and say: 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' (vs 32)
7. Out of that experience they went back to Jerusalem immediately and shared their experience, their testimony, with the inner circle of the eleven disciples of Jesus affirming with Simon Peter the fact of the resurrection.

What does this mean for us?

I think the seven points of the passage can be aspects that we can take 'on-board' in our Christian walk through life.

1. There will be opportunities for us to walk with others in life. Some of that journeying will be easy, at other times it may be difficult. However we are called to journey with others through life as Christ did.
2. There will be times where we ask the questions that allow others to share what is happening in their life. We need to listen as we journey together.
3. The third area is the most difficult. Teaching and sharing faith with others so that they may better understand the Scriptures. We don't want to be a Bible 'basher' but there will be times where we have permission to share our faith with others. Gently use those opportunities.
4. We need to invite Jesus into our lives. We also need to allow others to invite Jesus into their lives as well.
5. We are called to share hospitality as you never know what may come from this. Table fellowship is a wonderful way of getting to know people better and having much more meaningful discussions than just on a Sunday morning over a cuppa.
6. There will be the experiences where we feel the closeness of God and experience that for ourselves. It happens in a variety of ways and in this passage of Scripture it is very dramatic. Many God moments are not so distinct but we need to be open to the possibility for them to happen to us.
7. When we do have those experiences of the risen Lord present with us we need to tell others about them. Some 'new Christians' are a little 'over the top' with their evangelising so we need to be careful and appropriate. We note in this passage these two followers go and tell the 'eleven' of their faith experience. A relatively safe group to begin with and from there the word spread.

Conclusion

For me, I am thankful that I had Christians who journeyed with me, when as an older teenager I was quite disruptive, but they didn't give up on me. They were there for me to ask questions of them, such as 'Why do you believe in a God you can't see?' They would share their faith with me and it percolated for several years before I made a decision for Christ that changed my life.

Today I still remember clearly the time I accepted Christ into my life and I'm certain that Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple never forgot their Emmaus Road experience of the risen Lord. May we too find joy in experiencing the risen Lord in our life. Praise be to God. Amen.