

Easter 3 Luke 24:13-35

The Christian faith has been likened to a journey and the road to Emmaus is one of the most famous journeys described in the bible. When we make a journey we like to be well prepared. So often these days we rely on sat navs in the car to get us where we want to go, but we do it at our peril. How often have we heard of sat navs directing people through fields and even bodies of water. It just goes to show that when you make a journey you have to be confident in the things in which you will put your trust.

The following is a very famous poem and many of you will have all heard it before but it illustrates perfectly the point about preparing for a journey with regard to the journey of our lives. It reads;

I said to the man
who stood at the gate of the year
"Give me a light that I may tread safely
into the unknown."
And he replied: "Go out into the darkness
and put your hand into the hand of God.
That shall be better than light
and safer than a known way!"
So I went forth and finding the Hand of God
trod gladly into the night.
M. Louise Haskins (1875-1957)

In our Gospel reading this morning, the two disciples were on a journey. One was Cleopas, who was the other? Perhaps it was Luke the author of the Gospel. Some suggest that because Luke seems to know the details very intimately.

It had been a horrific week for the two men. The road from Jerusalem to Emmaus is about 7 miles - about a 2-hour walk. As they walked down the road, they struggled to understand what had happened. Jesus - on whom they had placed all their hopes - was dead. The Messiah had been killed, crucified on a Cross. The light of their world had been extinguished. As they walked along the road, they bumped into a man who engaged them in conversation and asked them why they are so sad. Yet they didn't recognise that it was Jesus with them.

They told him that Jesus who they had hoped would deliver Israel was dead. The man replied by explaining to them that all of this was in God's plan. Couldn't they understand, he said that the Scriptures pointed to a Suffering Messiah and not to Superman? And still they did not recognise Jesus with them. When they reached Emmaus, they invited the man to have supper with them. It was only when he took the bread, broke it and blessed it they recognised him. Jesus the Risen Lord.

Now, have you ever wondered why the disciples couldn't recognise him? Luke tells us the answer - a supernatural force was at work - God was at work. These two travellers were in the presence of Jesus, but were none the wiser. Luke tells us that "They were kept from recognizing him." (Lk 24:16) (NIV). Another translation of the Bible (NASB) reads "their eyes were prevented from recognizing him." Yet another translation says "their eyes were restrained." These two travellers were in the presence of Jesus, but were none the wiser. Sometimes God is at work and we don't recognize Him at work in our lives.

Often it is when we look back on an encounter with God, we recognise that he was there although we don't always see him at the time. Look at what the disciples said as they reflected on their walk to Emmaus: "Did not our hearts glow within us while he was talking to us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us".(Lk 24:32)

It wasn't Jesus' intellectual explanation that had meant much to them. It was his very presence that warmed their hearts. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church was 35 years old when he experienced a similar encounter with God. It was his conversion experience that happened on the evening of 24th May 1738. Wesley had gone very unwillingly to a non-conformist meeting in London (he was after all an Anglican vicar!). At the meeting someone began to read Martin Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans.

Let me read to you what Wesley himself wrote about the transformation that occurred as he listened to Luther's preface:

"About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."— The Journal of John Wesley.

Wesley says Strangely warmed – those disciples said - did not our hearts glow?

When we meet the risen Lord, we know we have done so – even if we can't quite describe what is going on. The two disciples were journeying on the road to Emmaus. They were confused and did not know what was going on. They were looking for a light to guide them. Jesus met them on the road but this only had any meaning to them when he was revealed to them.

Instead of finding a light to guide them, they were able to put their hand into the hand of God himself, the hand of Jesus, the Risen Christ. And you may recall that in probably the most famous post Resurrection experience of Jesus, Jesus asked Thomas quite literally to put his hand into Jesus hands.

In conclusion, let it be our prayer this morning that God our heavenly Father will reveal Jesus to us, as we come together in the breaking of bread in his name, so we too can recognise his presence in our lives and put our hands into the hand of God.