

The Emmaus Walk

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Easter 3A – Luke 24.13-49

Kids: *The Horse and his Boy*: CS Lewis; Ch 11 p.157f 'The unwelcome fellow traveller'

The Emmaus Walk is a journey which means something different to each of us. For some, it's an eyewitness account of the risen Jesus. For some, the fact that Jesus eats with the two disciples is a witness to his physical resurrection. Other people respond more to the disciples' hearts set afire by Jesus' teaching. It echoes how the teaching of Jesus has opened up new life for *them*.

For many people, though, the Emmaus Road is a journey that all of us travel again and again, from childhood to adolescence to adulthood to parenthood to retirement to dependence. These changes are often marked by significant changes in central relationships, or the endings of those relationships. Every stage begins with a mixture of loss and emptiness and fear. But later on, God willing, we'll always look back with quite a different perspective. Philip Newell captures this in a lovely prayer.

Like an infant's open-eyed wonder and the insights of a wise grandmother, like a young man's vision for justice and the vitality that shines in a girl's face, like tears that flow in a friend bereaved and laughter in a lover's eyes, you have given me ways of seeing, O God, you have endowed me with sight like your own. let these be alive in me this day, let these be alive in me.

J Philip Newell *Sounds of the Eternal*

The Emmaus Walk is a journey of farewell to old certainties; a journey through times where expectations abandon us. We suddenly journey without direction; we stumble blindly. And

then, just as the emptiness threatens to swallow us entirely, we're found. And in being found, we're given a new perspective. Once everything is new and hopeful again after this Emmaus Walk, in hindsight we see that it's in clear continuity with all we've ever been.

The Emmaus story represents the human journey beautifully. Just as we seem to be walking away from all we believed most real and it feels like hope and truth have abandoned us, we're given a new, transformed way of seeing.

The Filipino artist, Emmanuel Garibay, offers one such new way of seeing in his picture on our service booklets. He writes, *I have a different image of Jesus, which is that of woman, a very ordinary-looking Filipino woman, who drinks with them and has stories to tell. The idea of laughing is very common among Filipinos – to laugh at their mistakes. It's all part of understanding the culture, and it's also part of contextualising the concept of faith within the culture.*

<https://www.miat.org.au/jesus-laughing-ex/emmaus.html>

A healthy faith needs to be open to evolve. So is it strange that a healthy faith can necessarily involve times of walking away, despondent and sad, from cherished certainties? Sometimes, the old, fading truth we're clinging to can seem impossible to let go – far too precious. But unless we can let go, we can't be reborn. We'll be like a chrysalis that never becomes a butterfly.

What were Cleopas and his friend talking about so sadly? It was the greatest hope of their lives; the redemption of Israel. But it all depended utterly on Jesus living on in the way they'd known him to live until then. That hope had been dashed. Anywhere they went now was away; away from that lost joyful hope. But Jesus came to accompany them – gently to teach them again – to prise open those wounded hearts and eyes to reveal a deeper hope; a hope so deep in them that they had to learn how to recognise it. But even so, they *could* feel it.

Talking about it later, they told how their hearts had been set on fire by his words.

There was nothing inherently bad about their old hopes and dreams. But their old hopes and dreams depended on the continuation of Jesus' earthly life, and so they were inadequate to the bigger picture that Jesus' death and resurrection opened up. Walking sadly away from Jerusalem was a necessary part of their faith journey. The Emmaus Walk was the part of their journey where the unrecognisable, risen Jesus would meet them and give them what they needed to see him. Then they could go back and give new heart – new eyes to the others – and now to us. The Emmaus Walk isn't only a personal healing journey; it's the way along which God begins the transformation of communities – through you and me.

You'd think spiritual renewal might only come to those who are actively seeking it. But what we see here is that it comes looking for those who least expect it. And it comes in a category different altogether from what we'd normally imagine possible.

A delightful part of this enigma is that the exact location of Emmaus isn't known. Abu Ghosh is traditional, but Emmaus may be anywhere. Hearts burning and eyes opening aren't confined to just one place, either geographical or spiritual. Nor is spirituality confined to one way of doing things or seeing things. Emmaus comes into sight wherever a path has led us into a new communion with God; whenever we recognize that the risen Christ has been among us. That's just like the Holy Spirit; you can never quite catch her, but you can always tell where she's been.

Have you had an Emmaus Walk? Has Jesus come to travel with you when you least expected him to? Did he tell you something you need to run back and tell us? Amen