The Emmaus Walk; a new way of seeing

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Easter 3 Emmaus Walk – Luke 24.13-49

Children: *The Horse and his Boy*: CS Lewis; Ch 11 p.157f ‘The unwelcome fellow traveller’

The Emmaus Walk is a journey that means something different to each of us. For some, it’s a treasured eyewitness account of the risen Jesus; Jesus actually *eating* with the two disciples is a witness to his physical resurrection. Other people hear of the disciples’ hearts set afire by Jesus’ teaching and it resonates with the way the study of scripture has opened life up in a new way for *them*.

The Emmaus Road is a journey of the lost being found; the directionless being given a renewed sense of purpose and hope. It’s the journey all of us travel again and again through life – from childhood to adolescence, to adulthood, to parenthood, to retirement, to dependence. These changes often see the end of central relationships. Every change begins with a mixture of loss, emptiness and fear. But later on, by God’s grace, we will look back and see blessing in it with God’s own 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 begins as the journey of dejection; of farewell to old certainties where hope seems to abandon us. We trudge without purpose; we stumble blindly. But just when the emptiness threatens to swallow us entirely, we are found, we are given ourselves. And then in hindsight we can see that our new self is in clear continuity with everyone we’ve ever been.

Billions of people around the world today feel like we are caught up in the first stage of the Emmaus Journey. A tiny virus has smashed down all our certainties and priorities. We’ve been sucked up suddenly into some sort of a vacuum – set adrift on a directionless journey. But today’s Gospel reminds us that we will have a companion on this journey – it’s someone we might not recognise at first, but this lovely companion will be with us. So let’s trust; let’s step out together and see where the Emmaus Journey might lead.

The Emmaus story represents the human journey beautifully. Just as we seem to be driven away from all we believe is most real – when it feels like hope and truth have entirely abandoned us – we will be given a new way of seeing which is utterly transformative. Suddenly, we are new-made, and amazingly, that newness seems given to us simply by the way we can now see everything.

It may seem strange that a healthy faith should necessarily involve times in the wilderness, despondent and sad, with cherished certainties torn away. But it does. Sometimes, the

old, fading truth we're clinging to can seem impossible to let go – far too precious. But unless we can do it, we cannot be reborn. We'll be like a chrysalis who never becomes a butterfly.

We see this in today's story. What were Cleopas and his friend talking about so sadly? – the greatest hope of their lives; the political redemption of Israel. But it all depended utterly on Jesus living on in the way they thought they knew him. 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 hardly recognised it. But they could feel it. Talking about it later, they said their hearts had been set on fire by his words.

There was nothing inherently bad about their old hopes and dreams. But they couldn't contain the bigger picture that Jesus' death and resurrection opened up. Walking sadly away from Jerusalem was part of their journey – away from their limited vision, and on to where Jesus would meet them and give them what their hearts needed. Then they could go back and give new heart to the others – and now to us. The Emmaus Walk isn't just for personal healing; it's the way God begins the transformation of communities – through you and me.

Another thing; you'd think spiritual renewal / redemption / revelation might only come to those who actively seek it. But what we see here is that this new life comes looking for those who least expect it – and it comes in a way that is different altogether from what we'd normally imagine possible.

A funny thing is that the exact location of Emmaus isn't known. So 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. Emmaus comes into view wherever a path has led us into

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.

Three questions for silent meditation, or for discussion.

Have you had an Emmaus Walk?

Has Jesus come to travel with you when you least expected him to?

Did he tell you something that you should run back and tell us?

You can post your answers now if you like. Post them as a story or a prayer.

Footsteps in The Sand

One night I had a dream.

I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Across the sky flashed scenes from my life.

For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand:

one belonging to me, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of my life flashed before me

I looked back, at the footprints in the sand.

I noticed that many times along the path of my life

there was only one set of footprints.

I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of my life.

This really bothered me and I questioned the Lord about it:

“Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,

you’d walk with me all the way.

But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life

there’s only one set of footprints.

I don’t understand why, when I needed you most, you would leave me.”

The Lord replied:

“My precious child, I love you and I would never leave you.

During your times of trial and suffering,

when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”

Mary Stevenson, 1936