

## **“Walking With Jesus: The Road To Emmaus”**

4 April 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

### **Welcome & Call To Worship**

**Hymn of Preparation:** IPH 435 Christ the Lord is Risen Today

### **Prayers of Adoration & Confession**

**Reading:** Luke 24:13-35

### **Sermon:**

Let's take a moment and step into the scene: *“Jesus Himself came up and walked along with them” (v.15)*. **What happens when Jesus comes alongside?**

Life has been tough because of Covid, as everyone knows. It has affected us in a myriad of ways - isolation and mental health, fear of death, unemployment and loss of earnings, loss of significant life transitions and education, weddings, funerals, birthdays, end of school, sport. All have been affected; and so we have been living virtually, but we long for something much more tangible and personal. We react to the pressure and we are aware, in ourselves and others, of symptoms of stress, depression, anxiety, frustration, anger, and rebellion emerging in our hearts and transferring into our actions. This has been noted in many news-worthy stories of some breaking the Covid restrictions.

Life is often tough regardless of Covid, and we are aware of difficult life situations to be faced - a diagnosis of serious illness, a family member who is struggling mentally, exhaustion at work with little reward, separation from loved ones who are vulnerable, divorce, bereavement, squabbles between colleagues and friends. These are some of the situations that I am aware of in the everyday lives of the people I know.

The question I want to pose today as we walk with Jesus on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection from the dead, is what difference the resurrection of Jesus makes to life for those who believe in Him? These two people, Cleopas and another disciple (possibly His wife) walk the road to Emmaus, and they are like us. They are facing the difficulties, disappointments and doubts we encounter in life. Then Jesus comes alongside and walks with them. What happens when Jesus comes alongside the two on the road to Emmaus? Let us look at their situation and see if we can understand how they were transformed by their meeting with the resurrected Jesus.

#### **I. Jesus listens with interest (v.13-25).**

We like to walk and talk. How often have you passed a couple on your walks and you overhear a small part of their topic of conversation? No prizes for guessing the most common topic: all aspects of the Covid pandemic.

The first Easter Sunday was an unusual one for those close to Jesus, including for the two disciples. They have witnessed the death of Jesus on Friday and now have received reports of His resurrection on Sunday. As they walked, they talked, discussing the news about Jesus (v.14). It was a natural thing to do; it was significant news and they talk about, *“everything that had happened”*.

Jesus joins them, probably quite close to Jerusalem - "*are you the only visitor to Jerusalem?*" Verse 18 suggests He was close enough to Jerusalem to warrant that introduction, which means their journey together was a walk of about 10-11 kms (7 miles). This would take at least two hours to complete. We will come back to the fact that they didn't recognise Him; but, Jesus encourages them to talk and He is keen to listen. "*What are you discussing together as you walk along?*" He asks (v.17). However, they are taken aback when He asks, "*What things?*" (v.19). When a big news story emerges, it does take time for the full details to filter out, but the news of Jesus resurrection was headline news, and they expected anyone who had been in Jerusalem to be aware of the talk. So, to ask, "*What things?*" would be like someone saying, "What Coronavirus?" or "What restrictions?" Not knowing about the government restrictions or about vaccinations would be shocking!

Jesus comes alongside and is interested and keen to listen as they talk about how something important to them has impacted their lives. Jesus loves us so much that He longs to share life with you, to converse and hear all about your day and your life. He cares.

## **II. Jesus discerns how they are.**

His question appears to have deeply affected them. Our faces tell a picture; we can look tired, ill, joyful, or sad, and Cleopas and his friend are described as having faces which are "downcast" (v.17) - bowed, dull, sad. It is quite a poignant moment because they stop and stand still. [Having a stranger ask them what they were talking about brings the reality home and emphasises their sadness.

We discover they know a lot about Jesus. They had expectations and hopes about Him as Messiah and what He was going to do for them (v.21) but they were deeply disappointed: "*we had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel.*"

In addition, using their own words in verse 22, they were amazed by what the women had reported to them. Jesus' body was not in the tomb and angels had confirmed He was alive! "*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!*" They were perplexed by it because they were unable to believe their testimony. As Jesus perceptively says with clear and unambiguous directness, "*How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken*" (v.25).

One of the realities we face in the Covid pandemic is being forced to stop and stand still, to consider the reality of our lives like the two disciples. In summary, they are disappointed in Jesus, confused theologically about Him, amazed and perplexed at the claims made regarding His resurrection from the dead and struggling to believe with little faith. If that describes you in the situation you face today in life, then you can identify with the two disciples and they with you. However, it is important to note that Jesus is alongside and walks with them. He talks to them, He allows them to speak honestly about Him and how they truly feel. He encourages discussion, honest openness and He listens. He is not surprised by our reaction or dismissive of it; He knows our weaknesses, and He is prepared to give us the time and space to talk it out. Even though verse 25 is a devastating and honest summary of their condition, Jesus doesn't say it as condemnation, but as the beginning of explanation. It leads to His revealing Himself and helping them (v.26).

This picture of Jesus being alongside and His interaction with the two disciples encourages us to be open about our doubts, to speak of our feelings and ideas about what is happening in our lives. I want to encourage us to talk to God about the true state of our lives and

thoughts in prayer. He listens and as He reveals Himself, His desire is to help and transform us. As a church family, we believe in the priesthood of all believers; we believe that all God's people have a role in bringing each other to Christ. So, we encourage all of us to minister to one another, to find opportunity to walk alongside and listen, and as we will see, to share Scripture and pray, so that the person will see and know Jesus better. We can all be listeners, encouragers and helpers.

### **III. Jesus makes Himself known (v.26-31).**

The other day on my walk, I saw two Leinster Rugby players. I often see certain Leinster rugby players, because I walk in the grounds of UCD where they have their headquarters, gym and training pitches. I recognised them immediately, because I had seen them on TV. It wasn't difficult, even though I am still an Ulster fan! Yet these disciples cannot recognise Jesus, someone they had seen and followed closely. That is strange and begs the question - why? Why could they not recognise Him and how did they come to see Him?

Why could they not recognise him? Sometimes an explanation for everything isn't always possible. Here are some possible explanations. Perhaps they were not expecting to see a man they watched die alive again, or His appearance post-resurrection was different, yet ordinary and unremarkable. Verse 29 suggests it was not because of physical darkness. The Bible simply says "*they were kept from recognising Him*" (v.16). It was God who stopped them from seeing. That inability facilitated them speaking openly and forthrightly about Jesus, because they didn't know it was Jesus.

This is a humbling thing for humanity: we cannot see God unless he opens our eyes. We are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), and only God can open our eyes when and how He chooses. In 1 Corinthians 2, the apostle Paul says, "*The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit*" (v.14).

So only God can open our eyes to see Jesus, and as He does so, He teaches us from the Bible: "*He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself*" (v.27). The Bible speaks of Jesus; it is the word of God about God, and Jesus speaks from the Bible. Literally, they hear God speak of God as all of it is explained. The reference to "*Moses and all the prophets*" refers to the human authors of the Old Testament. In opening the Scriptures, they see Jesus and they hear Jesus. It affects them: their hearts burned, their emotions or affections were stirred (v.32). If we are to know Jesus, speaking in terms of relationship to have our minds and hearts stirred, then we must read and understand the Bible. The sticking point for these disciples was the suffering of the Messiah and that is the issue Jesus specifically tackles in v.26 by opening the Bible. When we take the time to walk alongside, to listen and understand the need, we need to be convinced of the need for the Bible to be brought into the conversation naturally in discussion. We must believe, as Jesus did, that the word of God is living and active, that it speaks of Jesus because Jesus is living and active, risen from the dead and very alive. This is God's ordained means of revealing Himself.

### **IV. Jesus opens their eyes in everyday moments (v.31-35).**

So, the two were intellectually convinced as Jesus opened the Scriptures; they were emotionally affected, as we or those we are talking with and sharing scripture with often are.

However, there is still the need to invite Jesus personally to stay, to continue the relationship (v.29). When they ask Jesus to stay, He does: “so He went in to stay with them”.

Inviting Jesus to stay included the opportunity to eat together, as the usual and common act of hospitality. It was the moment that God chose to open their eyes. Perhaps they saw the scars on His hands in the light of a lamp as He broke the bread.

It is reassuring that Jesus doesn't expect us to do anything unusual or bizarre as we seek to come alongside people and introduce them to Jesus in their everyday lives. In the walk, in the meal, in the bike ride, in the BBQ, in the game of golf, in visiting, in the activities of life Jesus makes Himself known. Jesus takes the initiative, He comes alongside them, He encourages discussion about life. He shares Scripture, He shares life in the context of love and relationships. He does not force Himself on them; He waits until they invite Him to stay. At that moment, their eyes “were opened” and they saw Him as the risen Jesus, the one who had died and was now alive. They saw and believed it.

Having met Jesus, they return to the believers to share fellowship and their insight with the apostles and other disciples. Their doubts, disappointment, confusion, sadness, and tiredness have been dismissed through their personal encounter with Jesus; they are energised enough through the food eaten, the short rest and the encouragement of meeting Jesus to go back to Jerusalem and share what they now knew with the others.

*“It is true the Lord has risen!”* Jesus walks with us in life and, having experienced a life-giving relationship with Him in the truth of the Scriptures, we have good news to share as we walk alongside others, bringing His life to them. Having met with the risen Jesus, we share Him with others!

Ethan's story is one of wrestling with doubts about Jesus and how God brought alongside him others who knew Jesus and enabled him to encounter Jesus through reading the Bible, revealing Himself in a fresh and helpful way that was transformative.

### **Walking With Jesus: Ethan's story**

Doubt and struggle played a big part in my journey to becoming a Christian. When I was at university, I struggled a lot with the idea of what I was going to do with my life. I often felt hopeless and that my life didn't have a purpose. My faith was very weak and often non-existent. I remember that instead of looking to the God that I had come to know in my childhood, I tried to look to myself for answers to the questions that I had. *What do I want to do with my life? How do I want to live? What are the things that make me happy?* But the more that I tried to answer those questions on my own, the deeper the doubt became.

But in my doubts and struggles, even though I was not seeking God, He did not abandon me. As part of my university degree, I needed to spend some time in Spain to learn Spanish. It was there that I first got involved with GBU, a group that organises Bible studies and supports Christians in Spanish universities. I went to the annual summer camp for the GBU and during this time, God opened my eyes to the answers that He had to my questions. He showed me that the idea that I had about Him was completely wrong. He was not a distant God who only became a part of my life on Sundays or when I had an emergency that I needed to pray for. He was my Father who sent His own Son to die for me in my place. Through the teaching at that camp and the friends that I made during my time in Spain, God

showed me that it was Him that I needed to rely on and not myself. He gave me strong Christian friends and leaders who helped me see what living as a Christian truly looked like. They also introduced me to reading the Bible for myself and having a strong and personal relationship with Jesus. This was challenging and scary, but it gave me what I had been looking for - a purpose, not just for my life, but for eternity.

One of the books from the Bible that really helped and encouraged me in that period was Hosea. It mirrored my story, because it tells of how Israel had turned away from God and was going on without Him. But despite the mess that Israel had got themselves into, God does not leave them or abandon them. He continues to go after them and He remains their God. I'll finish with the first four verses from Chapter 11 of Hosea, where God says: 'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realise it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek and I bent down to feed them.' God never once abandoned me. In all my struggles and doubts, He was, and still is, taking care of me.

**Praise:** Open The Eyes Of My Heart

**Prayers for Others**

**Closing Hymn:** Christ Is Mine Forevermore

**Benediction:** "Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20-21)

**Discussion & Application:**

Describe the feelings of the two disciples.

How did Jesus come to know what they were thinking and feeling?

How did Jesus help them?

What can we learn from Jesus about relating to others?