

## **A Stranger Recognised In-deed!**

*(Preached at Footscray Baptist Church on April 26, 2020 by Cheryl Williams– Luke 24:13-35)*

Yesterday was Anzac Day.

I baked Anzac biscuits and crocheted poppies and dropped them off in little packages to my uncle and my neighbour. My uncle found himself at the Battle of Tarakan in Borneo in 1945 and has suffered post traumatic stress ever since, more pronounced in the last few years, he never talked about it until about 15 years ago, recently he gets severe panic attacks. My neighbour's number was called and he went to Vietnam.

The older I get the more sentimental I find myself getting.

However, the increasing numbers of people commemorating this even continues to baffle me.

We Aussies and New Zealanders commemorate an event that was a massive failure. Thousands upon thousands from all sides lost their lives, so many young men killed.

Most WW1 veterans (of whom we now have none) I have heard speak in the past have spoken about the senselessness of war and the great lesson is to not repeat it and to live in peace.

So why our fascination with a failed campaign? Is it the courage in the face of overwhelming odds that inspires us? Is it the looking out for another?

In our bible reading today we find two people on the road. Walking and talking about the recent failure, the failure of Jesus to come through, the failure of the Messiah to fulfill their hopes of freedom. All hopes now dashed. Despondent, grief-stricken they make their way home from Jerusalem, they take the road back to Emmaus. The trip longer and harder, no doubt, after all they had just witnessed.

As they walk, they are joined by a stranger. They don't recognise this person, but will be reminded later.

The stranger asks them what are they talking about. They relate their story, their understanding of the events of recent days – betrayal, denial, crucifixion and an empty tomb. In the telling of their sadness, of their sense of feeling defeated, their hopelessness is obvious in their downcast voices. Ironically and exasperated they say to the stranger – are you the only one around these parts that hasn't heard about this, who doesn't know what had happened?

As they tell their story they speak of the tale from the women and an empty tomb. Even in the retelling the penny still has not dropped.

And then the reminder – how slow of heart; didn't the prophets say that the Messiah must suffer; then some teaching from their scriptures – all from a stranger who seemingly had not known of the events of recent days.

And yet they still did not recognise him, they still could not put two and two together, but they yearned for more. They urge the stranger to stay with them, they offer meal, somewhere to stay, hospitality. There is something stirring.

So, they sit at the table together. The stranger, the guest suddenly becomes the host – he takes bread, he breaks bread, he blesses bread and, he shares the bread.

And then they remember. Remember that last meal. In this act or re-remembering, the stranger is recognised. The stranger is recognised in his actions. The stranger is recognised in this ritual. The stranger is recognised in his deeds. The stranger is recognised indeed!

The penny has dropped!

Hope is rekindled!

Jesus is made known in the doing!

And then he vanishes.

But they are changed!

Full of hope, eager to share their story, they take to the road again, back to where they have just come, back to Jerusalem, back to share their story; their experience; their insight with the others.

In this story Jesus shows us how to walk his way.

Jesus meets people in the midst of their brokenness.

Jesus asks questions and invites the other to tell their story, to explain things from their point of view.

Jesus respects their human experience.

Jesus helps them put their story into a wider context, helps them integrate their experience with what they know, including their spiritual knowledge and experience, he helps them make sense of their story. In the meeting or encounter, Jesus, offers them the hospitality of God. In his very familiar actions, he is recognised.

Our call is to walk the way of Jesus, to walk the way of the stranger, to follow in his footsteps.

So in this strange time, in this time where we do not know what will happen next, in this time when we are physically distant, in this time when we are communicating differently, especially in this time when those around us are more anxious and less certain – the way of Jesus remains the same, it is one of the things that hasn't changed.

The call is to listen deeply to the story of the disillusioned, to the story of the suffering, to the story of the broken and hear them out.

The call is to respect their understanding of their story and situation.

The call is to help them make sense of whatever their experience is.

The call is to reveal ourselves as followers of Jesus in our deeds, in our actions, in our responses.

Right now, that might mean listening to the story of the elderly who feel the isolation more than ever and do something. It might mean listening to asylum seekers living at the Mantra Hotel in Preston as they worry about the virus getting into their shared accommodation. It might mean checking out how are neighbours are going and offering hospitality by dropping little packages of treats at their door. It might mean remembering and praying for our brothers and sisters in Africa, India, Singapore, the Pacific – where this virus is just now starting to have a first or second effect. It might mean understanding the trauma of our Muslim community forced to keep Ramadan in a totally different way.

Peter in his letter reminds us that now that we have the truth, we will have genuine mutual love. That we should love one another deeply from the heart. We have been born anew by the living and enduring word of God.

Let us not forget, that Jesus is our companion on the way. Just as he shared the road, the story, the disappointment, the disillusionment of the two on the road to Emmaus, so he shares the road with us. Amen.