

Remembering on the Road

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on April 24th, 12022 – Luke 24:13-49)

When my Dad died, I received a call from a friend at university. We had lost touch many, many years ago, but she had kept in touch with another friend and just happened to be in Geelong at that time. She rang to offer her condolences and to ask if she could attend the funeral. Of course, I was happy to see her. On the day of the funeral, I saw a woman with grey curly hair that I knew I should know but whom I couldn't place. I asked someone who she was but they didn't know. Sensing my confusion, she approached me and introduced herself. As soon as she spoke, I knew she was who she said she was, she soon hopped in and helped serve tea and coffee. We caught up again and again and now keep in regular touch even though she has moved back to Darwin. Our relationship took up where it had left off so many years before. Sometimes meeting again after many years can be awkward but not this one, it felt so comfortable, as if the years between were just a few days. Like the two on the road in the midst of my grief and confusion she made herself known to me and provided comfort.

So, we have two people most probably Cleopas and his wife walking along the road making the journey home after all the events in Jerusalem. Dejected, going over and over the events of the past couple of weeks – the celebration of Palm Sunday that turned sinister and there was betrayal, denial, a trial and ultimately crucifixion – this had dashed their hopes, they thought he was the one to liberate the people, but what good is a dead Messiah? So, here they are trudging home, dreams shattered, so consumed with grief that they couldn't even ask questions about the women's report of an empty tomb. Joined on the journey home by a stranger, they can't believe he knows nothing of what had happened, so they retell the story. He listens and asks some questions and then can't help himself and tells them how foolish they are, remember, remember what was said about this prophet and he then went over the scriptures again, slowly the penny began to drop and they began to recognize him as Jesus, they didn't want him to leave again so they ask him to stay. He does, they share some food and when he breaks bread his identity is confirmed and then he is gone. Remembering now, they realize the stranger is indeed their risen Lord, they run back to Jerusalem to tell the others and when they get there, they hear more stories of Jesus encountering others.

Then it happens again, as they talk and try to make sense of these events and encounters, Jesus enters and helps them recognize him by using familiar words – Peace be with you. This time he explains scripture to them and asks for food, offers to show his hands and his feet. Providing proof to them that this is real and he is who they hope he is and then he is gone. Joy, disbelief and wondering – Jesus meets them in the midst of it all. It is mysterious yet real. It helps them understand themselves and their task to share all they have witnessed. It all begins to make sense. It changes them, it begins a worldwide movement. It makes them who they are.

Do you remember your first encounter with Jesus? Maybe we met Jesus the teacher, or the healer, or the compassionate one, or the revolutionary, or the prayer, or the one who frees or includes, or the one who challenges.

Can you see the word made flesh in our world now? Is Jesus real and present in your 'now'?

In our journeys of faith, so often we are like this little band of confused disciples. We fail to see Jesus in our midst, but perhaps we need to ask ourselves what kind of Jesus are we looking for? What gets in the way of our recognizing him – is it our busyness, is it our self-centeredness, is it our certainty, is it our preoccupation with our own troubles or are we not even looking?

Maybe it is time to reacquaint ourselves with Jesus, both the one revealed in Scripture and the Risen Lord in our experience. Let's reread our sacred text in such a way to simply encounter Jesus. Let's allow his commands to really make a difference in our daily lives. Let's put aside our dearly held theology, our preconceived ideas and allow ourselves to be encountered by the Jesus we find in the New Testament in ways that will be surprising and new.

Let's use the Easter season as we head toward Pentecost to reacquaint ourselves with Jesus, to meet Jesus again for the very first time.

And then to go about the same task as those first believers, to bear witness to what we encounter and discover. To share the love, the freedom, the joy, the acceptance, the compassion we find in the story of the one who is central to our faith.

Remembering and recognizing Jesus changed those first believers. May we too be changed by our continuing encounter with Jesus. And as we are changed may our lives become a conduit for others to recognize Jesus, maybe for the very first time. Amen.