

Cleopas on the Road

(Written by Cheryl Williams for use @ Footscray Baptist Church, April 23rd, 2023 - Luke 24:13-35)

So, we began our journey home, back to Emmaus which was about seven miles from the capital where we had been for Passover. My wife and I, (I am called Cleopas), well I guess we trudged really, despondent, and deeply sad. Couldn't believe how it all had played out, it all felt like a failure really. Failure of Jesus to come through for us all, failure of a Messiah to save the people, failure to fulfill our dreams of freedom. All our hopes had now been dashed.

It felt like the trip took so much longer than usual, guess that is what happens when you are just going over and over things in your mind. We relived it all – the meal and the washing of feet and breaking bread together, the silence and darkness in the garden, the arrest, the kangaroo court of a trial, the back and forth as they sent Jesus from Pilate and the other leaders, the sentence, the crowd baying for blood, that long walk out to that horrible hill, the agony and humiliation of that death on the cross, the grief of his followers and the final act - burial.

These events had been the talk of the region and we just kept going over them again and again.

As we walked a man joined us, we didn't know him. He said that he couldn't help overhearing our conversation and asked us what we were talking about. Well, we couldn't believe he didn't know, hadn't heard, he must have been the only one around these parts who didn't know. Guess he stopped us dead in our tracks. He asked us to tell him more, so we did – told him about Jesus of Nazareth who was in our view a great prophet, who had done some amazing deeds, some miracles and was indeed a great teacher. He had given us a new lease of life, he had challenged our old ways of thinking and introduced us to a God who loved without favour, who accepted all, who wanted us to err on the side of kindness to others, even if that meant breaking the rules and upsetting others. We then went through in more detail the events of the last week or so, and said the tragedy happened three days ago. We then told him how we had heard that some of the women had gathered at the tomb and couldn't find Jesus and that they had a kind of vision and in that were told that Jesus was alive. This was quite unbelievable, and we all know that women can't be true witnesses, so some of the fellows went and checked it out and said that what the women had said was true.

I stopped talking and then the stranger started to speak. Turns out he knew something of Jesus and scripture. He called us fools. That took us aback somewhat. Then he started quoting Scripture and talking about things we sort of understood, that the Messiah would suffer, then he spoke about Moses and the other prophets, clearly, he knew his stuff, quite a scholar. We wanted to know more. This part of the journey went so much quicker than the first part as we listened. We reached our home, and it looked like the stranger was going to keep going, we wanted to hear more, we looked at each other and I then invited him to join us in our home. It was getting dark so it made sense to ask if he would like to stay, have a meal, talk some more.

My wife cobbled together a simple meal – soup and bread. As we began to eat, he took some bread and gave thanks for it, then he broke it. My wife and I looked at each other, we had seen that done before, on a mountain where thousands were fed, in a small room with the followers where a simple meal was shared. Then we started to remember, remember how Jesus had said the broken bread was like his body, broken for others. How he had talked about the wine, that it was a symbol of his blood that would be shed for others. The penny began to drop, could it be? Could we be entertaining the risen Christ? We summoned up the courage to ask but he was gone just as quickly as he had appeared.

We started to chatter excitedly, talked about how engaging he was on our long walk home, about how much we learnt when he explained the Scriptures to us again, how we wanted him to stay for ever and to keep explaining these things to us. There was something about him, something we couldn't put our finger on, but now, now we know it was the Risen Christ in our midst, he was risen, just like he said he would, and he had come to us in our grief, he had freed us from our sadness.

Well, the soup and bread remained uneaten, we just left it on the table, gathered our things and ourselves and took to the road again, back to Jerusalem to find the others. Let me tell you the trip this time was so much quicker, we almost ran all the way. When we got there, they had similar stories, they too had seen the Risen Lord, they too had encountered them.

We told them what had happened to us and how it was in the breaking of bread that we finally recognized Him. Here we were offering hospitality to a stranger, who turned things around – he took the bread, he became the host, he gave thanks, he broke it and shared it with us. This was the moment we recognized him, in the familiar act of breaking and sharing bread we knew who he was.

We learnt so much about the one we would follow for the rest of our lives that night. We learnt the importance of listening to the story of another's grief and pain. We learnt the importance of helping others make sense of their experience. We learnt the importance of respecting the way another understood their own experience, story, and situation. He modelled those things for us throughout his life and that night as we walked together.

Jesus is indeed our companion, he shares the road, the story, the disappointments, the disillusionment but will always find a way to reveal his love to us. He stirs something within us and calls us out into the world to be his hands and feet.