

A favourite passage: The road to Emmaus... Luke Ch. 24: 13-35

Quotations are from the KJV – Helen Poole

If you could choose just one gospel to take with you on a long journey, which would it be?

For me I think it would be a close contest between Luke and John, but in the end it would have to be Luke. Not just because of his affirmation of women and his concern for the marginalised and not just because of the Prodigal Son, although that would certainly be very high on the list, but because of the road to Emmaus. Just 22 verses from the whole treasure chest but they can speak to us on so many levels.

There they are, two people on a journey, shortly after the crucifixion, walking along the road and going over the momentous events to have touched their lives in the last few days, just as we might do when something turns our own lives upside down, when they become conscious of a third person walking along beside them..*but their eyes were holden that they should not know him.*

And as this stranger walks along with them, and asks them why they seem so sad, they explain their disappointment.....*for we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel, but also their astonishing hope, because of the women's discovery, who .. found not his body... but a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.*

Then, seeing their bewilderment, the stranger, starting from the very beginning, explains everything to them and in doing so shows them why some things, some such painful things, in fact the very things that make them so sad, just had to be. And so the story would have ended and the stranger gone on his way, had they not invited him to stay.

But it's not until they sit down to share a meal, in that scene so beautifully captured by Caravaggio, that something glorious happens: *he took bread, blessed and brake and gave..* And in those four precious actions which we still use in every Eucharist today and which still bring life and hope to millions, their eyes are opened and they recognise their mysterious companion. They see Jesus. But as soon as they recognise him, he disappears...

And in their wondering realisation, there it is, that lovely question: *"Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way?"*

I think nearly all of us can look back to certain times in our lives when that has happened: a moment of transcendence when the ordinary becomes extraordinary, but just as we begin to grasp it, it disappears. It's as though it would be too much for us to bear in its entirety, but even so, that all too brief experience is often so profound and the promise so joyful, that the wonder of it never leaves us; and even after many years we too can look back in wonderment and honestly say, with these travellers, *did not our heart burn within us ?.*

And just as in this story, when the two friends go back to Jerusalem to share their experience and discover to their joy that it is indeed true, so it can be for us when we hear of those epiphany moments in other people's lives. Never exactly the same of course, for each gift is God-given and tailor-made, but moments of transfiguration and joy that are truly a gift of the living God.

But it's not just because this is such a beautiful description of a meeting with the living Jesus, that I love the story. It's because it stays a mystery and so it can speak directly to us; and it speaks to me in this glimpse of a beloved friend walking along beside us, often unseen, and often in ordinary daily living, "*in breaking of bread*". And I love it too because it speaks to me of the Great Christian Hope.

Of course there are many accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances and each one is a piece of the jigsaw, but I think this one goes further. It helps us to think a little more about the question that so many of us ask, especially as we grow older; the question that later on, someone would write down in a letter to Paul.. "*How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?*"

If we are in Christ and He is in us, then we shall surely be like Him. So yes, and the other accounts confirm it, we shall still be ourselves. But we shall be different. Recognisable, yet transfigured. We shall know one another and rejoice in one another and even share a glorious meal together.

But then, and this is another lovely thing, at long last, we shall be able to understand all those things we long to understand here and now, for everything will be explained. *For now, writes Paul, we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face...now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

Just as the travellers' hope was confirmed, so will ours be. Face to face with Love, we shall know with all our hearts that the One we trusted here is truly The One to redeem us.

We shall see why some things, even some such painful things have had to be; and, when we are able to bear it, we shall see too, that all the God-given glimpses shown to us in this life are indeed faithful and true.

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