

God Space

Wondering Like Jesus

Before I read our passage from Luke chapter 24 I'd like to encourage you to listen to the story on two different levels.

The first level listening is listening to the events of the story –the story itself, what the story is doing and what events are taking place. Let me set the scene of this event.

This is the story of two disciples of Jesus as they are walking from Jerusalem to a town called Emmaus, generally called in most bibles, the Road to Emmaus. This is happening on Easter Sunday, the day that Jesus rose from the dead. And these two disciples do not yet know, that Jesus is alive and nor about the chaos that is happening back in Jerusalem. And on this journey to Emmaus they meet Jesus, although they don't realise that it is him. This is a bit of a mystery, in that they see him, they walk with him, yet they don't recognise him at first.

So the first level of listening is to listen to the events of the story.

The second level of listening is on the level of the structure of the story. Many of the stories told in the bible have structure, it is often the way people remember stories when living in a highly oral culture and this certainly would have been the primary way people passed on information in Jesus' day. That's why people remember words of songs because they are usually have a structure to them.

This story has a structure, it is called a chiasmic structure, which means that it has a development of theme and ideas which progress in one direction until halfway through, then at the turning point of the story the same themes and ideas are repeated but in the opposite order. When a story is told in this way it emphasises the turning point. That is how many bible stories function.

- Jerusalem Journey
- Appearance and recognition
- Interaction
- "the things"
- Empty tomb and vision
- Jesus is alive.

Luke 24:13-35

¹³ That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, 10km from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. ¹⁶ But God kept them from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?"

They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. ¹⁸ Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days."

¹⁹ "What things?" Jesus asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. ²⁰ But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. ²¹ We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.

²² "Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. ²³ They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! ²⁴ Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said."

²⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. ²⁶ Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" ²⁷ Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

²⁸ By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, ²⁹ but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. ³⁰ As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!

³² They said to each other, “Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” ³³ And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, ³⁴ who said, “The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter.”

³⁵ Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread.

Jesus is alive

The one point of that story and the one point of this sermon is that **Jesus is alive**. The one point of the story of the disciples of Jesus going on the Road to Emmaus is that **Jesus is alive**. If there is one thing to take away from this reading of the story is that **Jesus is alive** – that is a truth that we often talk about, and celebrate, and rejoice, but take for granted.

It is one thing for us to believe Jesus is Alive, it is another thing for us to experience that as a reality, like these two disciples did on the road to Emmaus. So often we think of Jesus being alive as something that happened historically and we relegate it to the book shelf of history – as though at one point in the past, Jesus came back to life, which is true, but we leave that fact there on the book shelf along with all the other historical ideas, facts and things that we have learn over the years. We treat it like a piece of information for us to know, not a reality for us to experience.

To that end I think we have something in common with these two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

- They had heard a lot about Jesus.
- They were disciples of Jesus, they knew his teachings, seen his miracles, they knew about his betrayal, his arrest, his crucifixion.
- And even on this Easter Sunday they had heard rumours that his tomb was empty and that he was alive, but up until this point they had not experienced that as a reality in their own lives.
- They knew all of the right things but they had not experienced the reality of a relationship with this living Lord.

I think that is true of a lot of people today, possibly some of you here. We know a lot about Jesus, we know the Bible stories, we talk about the details about his life and his ministry, his death and resurrection, but we may not have yet experienced the reality of relationship with this living King.

The hero of the this story is not Cleopas or his companion, the two disciples, **the hero is of course Jesus**, the one who is alive, the one who joins these two, not just as a historical person, but as a real person who engages with them. The hero is the one who walks up to a couple of people who don't recognise him and engages in a spiritual conversation with them.

What is fascinating about this encounter is the Jesus doesn't just pull back the curtain and say, "voila – 'tis me" look at my hands, look at my feet, look at my side – he said that on other occasions – but not here. He let the mystery ride for a little bit longer, he entered into their conversation, without forcing it in any particular direction. He joined the journey of these two disciples and was sensitive to what God was doing with them, he was noticing where God was at work – **God space**.

Over the last few weeks we have been looking at this concept of **Godspace**. That space within us and around us in which God is working in the lives of us and in the lives of people around us. We have been looking at this in a way of thinking about the idea of evangelism. A task that all of us as Christians have - sharing the good news of Jesus to people around us.

But the funny thing about this idea of Godspace is that 'telling' is not the central act that we have to accomplish. In fact up to this point we haven't really been asked to say anything, it has all been about what God is doing in someone else's life.

We have talked about **noticing what God was doing** in someone else's life, just noticing. Matt talked about **Listening**, listening deeply to someone else's needs and concerns. Listening to the person's fears, the doubts, the anger, just to listen. The Godspace book also talks about serving and hospitality with no other agenda but to bless the person, to be a friend, to walk with.

Godspace is all about paying special attention to what God doing in someone else's life, and then joining in conversation with them.

Wondering

Up to this point we haven't had to say anything about Jesus. But today we turn a small corner when we begin to actually speak to people, not preach to people, but to ask questions. **The idea here is all about wondering.** It's all about asking questions, not about saying 'this is the path to salvation walk ye in it'. It's just about asking questions, it's about wondering with people – I wonder what God is doing in your life.

Asking a question with the beginning 'I wonder' is a very gentle way of asking a question.

- I wonder how did you arrive at that belief?
- I wonder what role has religion played in your life?
- I wonder what you think you have to give up in order to become a Christian?
- I wonder why does it seem that the topic of God stirs up such strong emotion?

Very simple wondering questions that open the doors for deeper conversation and mutual reflection. Real honest wondering helps us become more sensitive to other people and to God himself, who is already at work in our lives and the lives of those around us.

It's this kind of wondering that Jesus practices in this story from Luke 24. As he joins this two disciples on their journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. He wonders with them.

- I wonder – what are you discussing together as you walk along?
- I wonder what things have happened in Jerusalem lately?

We may be tempted to think that Jesus is just playing with them, because we know that Jesus knows exactly what has happened. Obviously he doesn't need to know the answer to the question. He is living the answer to the question, and we as readers know that he knows.

The only people in the dark are Cleopas and his mate. These two who do not yet realise that **Jesus is alive**. Jesus asks 'I wonder what things you are talking about?' Because he really wants to know what they are thinking, he really wants to know what they are experiencing?

They tell Jesus the whole sad story of Jesus' betrayal, his arrest, and that their hopes that have been dashed, and now the question of where Jesus is, the

mystery of the empty tomb. They don't know what to make of that and the comment that 'Jesus is alive', that central feature of this story.

It's not until Jesus sits down at a table with them and shares a meal with them that things become clear. Just as he has shared a meal with his disciples just a few days before, what we call the Lord's Supper or communion, and just like the miraculous feeding of the 5000, Jesus took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them. There was something in the transaction, something in that shared meal that revealed to these two disciples who it was that was in their presence.

Jesus is alive

In that moment they realised what we as the readers already know, that Jesus is in fact alive.

- Sometimes in our lives we need a slap, to wake up to the fact that Jesus is alive.
- Sometimes in our lives we need to recognise that Jesus is on the same journey we are on, and that he wants to get to know us, and hear what we are concerned about.
- There are moments in our lives when we really need to know that Jesus shows up and is walking right alongside us and
- sometimes there are moments in our lives when we are called to do the showing up in other people's lives, to be the hands and feet of Jesus, to walk alongside somebody struggling, to get to know them, to wonder with them about the amazing truth that Jesus is alive.

Disciples and servants

You see there are two sides to the Christian life, two phases, two different dimensions, to what we do as followers. We grow as disciples and we grow as servants. We become closer to Jesus and we become closer to those around us, and all of it is for the sake of God's kingdom.

This is tied up in our vision as a congregation

To live like Jesus - To love without measure - To learn our faith - To lead to make a difference.

All of it is tied together in engaging with the kingdom of God as it breaks into this world and walking with Jesus, who is alive

Your homework this week is to continue the work of noticing where God is at work, growing in your sensitivity in listening to God, looking for the Godspace within the lives of yourself and others around you.

And specifically this week, find one person in your world that you notice that God is working in, you may have done the hard work of serving and listening but now you might have the opportunity to wonder with them. Just ask a very simple wondering question. Something prompted by what they are saying or experiencing –

- I wonder what this is like for you,
- I wonder where you see God at work in this,
- I wonder what you think you have to give up to become a Christian
- I wonder what this change in your life means for you –

and see where the conversation goes.

Because sometimes Jesus himself shows up alongside us in the journey to Emmaus, and we don't realise that it is him, until we sit down and share a meal, and spend time together.

Find someone this week you can wonder with.