

LIVES SHATTERED, LIVES RESTORED

Acts 2. 14a, 36-41

1 Peter 1. 17-23

Luke 24. 13-35

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

‘The Walk to Emmaus’ is a wonderful and well-known story. It is a story which begs to be recognised as a story about our own lives; and it is a story which invites us to think about those points and those places where our Lord’s life intersects with ours. One could call it a story of shattering and restoration.

If your life has ever been shattered, then this is your story. If your life has ever been restored, then this is your story. And if you’ve ever been in that in-between place, between shattering and restoration, then this is your story, too.

If we look closely at this story, we see that it describes a journey: a departure from Jerusalem, and a journey towards Emmaus; and then, a departure from Emmaus, and a journey back to Jerusalem. In the story, the journey is taken by Cleopas and his companion; but it is also a journey that each one of us has taken, is taking, or will take. This journey is not, however, a journey that we take only once. It is a journey that we take again and again.

I am not talking, of course, about Jerusalem and Emmaus¹ as particular geographical locations or destinations to which we will travel. I am talking about them as archetypal realities. There is a Jerusalem within us and an Emmaus within us; and both get enacted in our lives. And as we shall see in a moment, our ‘Jerusalem’ and

¹ It is interesting to note that the exact location of Emmaus has not yet been discovered by archaeologists, even though the Scriptures tells us that it was located ‘seven miles from Jerusalem’.

our 'Emmaus' are doors that lead us to a greater self-awareness; they are windows through which we see a greater fullness of God, ourselves, each other and the world.

Jerusalem

We start, then, with Jerusalem. Have you ever felt like you just had to get away? Or felt like life had given you more than you could handle? Perhaps that moment happened when you were deeply disappointed, or when you did everything right, and life still didn't work out the way you planned or wanted. Or maybe it happened when your world was turned upside-down, for other reasons. Perhaps it was when you grieved the death of a loved one, a dream, an identity, or a future. At that point, you may have felt that your life was utterly shattered. If so, then you know what it's like to be Cleopas and his companion.

It's Easter morning, and the two disciples are leaving Jerusalem. Who can blame them? Jerusalem is a place of pain, sorrow and loss. It's a place of death, unmet expectations and disappointment. No one wants to stay in that place. As Cleopas and his companion walk away from Jerusalem, they are talking about all the things that happened and (I suspect) all the things that *didn't* happen.

They are talking about Jesus's arrest, torture, crucifixion and death. They are talking about hope that didn't materialise and investments that paid no return. They are sad. They are disappointed. They had hoped that Christ was the one, but now he's dead. And there's a part of them that's been lost, too: a part of them that died with him. Oh yes, they had heard rumours that he was alive, but it all sounded like an 'idle tale' (Luke 24. 11). There was nothing to keep Cleopas and his companion in Jerusalem. Their lives had been shattered.

Emmaus

We are not told why the disciples decided to go to Emmaus. If anything, Emmaus was a good enough destination because any place would be better than Jerusalem. Emmaus, thought Cleopas and his companion, would be place of escape; but what they didn't know was that Emmaus would also be the way back to life.

As the disciples left Jerusalem and travelled to Emmaus, not only were they shattered; they were hungry. Not physically hungry, of course; hungry for wholeness, hungry for life, hungry for restoration.

We all know that hunger is more than physical. It also spiritual and emotional. We are, by nature, 'hungry' people. We hunger for life, love, wholeness, community, meaning and purpose. That same hunger is surely the reason why Cleopas and his companion strongly urged our Lord to 'Stay with (them)' in Emmaus. As it turned out, Jesus would not only stay; he would feed them. The guest whom they invited to their table would in fact become their host.

'When (Christ) was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him.' The disciples recognised him as the one they had left dead in Jerusalem. They recognised him as the same one who had accompanied them on the road to Emmaus. They recognised him as the one they had hoped he would be.

Our Lord fed them not just with bread, of course, but with *himself*: with his body, his life, his love, his compassion, his strength, his forgiveness, his hope, with all that he is and all that he has.

And as Jesus gave them bread, he also gave them back themselves. This was their restoration. When Christ broke the bread, something in them broke open. With

that breaking open, their lives were being put back together. And so it is for us. As we encounter and recognise our Lord to be present with us,² our lives are ‘broken open’ in ways we could never imagine or have done for ourselves.

But as soon as they saw and recognised Jesus, ‘he vanished from their sight’. Was he abandoning them? Was he undoing everything that just happened? No. It wasn’t anything like that. He was no longer before them because he was now *within them*. Christ was the burning heart within them, and it had been there all along. Sometimes that burning is felt as brokenness; sometimes as hunger; or being broken open; and other times as deep joy and gratitude. But it is always our Lord whose presence within us is ‘our burning heart’.

And ‘that same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem’.

Jerusalem

Cleopas and his companion returned to the place from which they had to get away. Jerusalem, which formerly was only the place of death, has also become the place of life. It is not only a place of sorrow, it is a place of joy. It is not only a place of shattering; it is a place of restoration.

The disciples arrive with news of their Emmaus experience only to hear that Jesus was alive, seen, and present in Jerusalem!

Shattered lives, restored lives. Jerusalem, Emmaus, Jerusalem. That seems to be the pattern. It’s never, however, as simple or easy as it sounds. It’s one thing to name the pattern, but another to live it. It takes time and effort. It’s not easy. It means trusting that somehow the shards of our lives will become the pieces for a new life, a new seeing, a new way of living – all because of Christ. Our Lord’s life ‘intersects’

² This of course happens every time we partake of the Eucharist; and it happens at other times, too.

with ours at *each moment* of shattering, and at *each moment* of restoration. Jesus is ever-present with us on our journey, from Jerusalem, to Emmaus and back again. And he feeds us and nourishes us *with himself* in so many ways along the way.

‘Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
Blessed are those who are called to his supper.’

Amen.