

The challenges from Emmaus road

For those who were here in church last Sunday, you would have heard the story of the disciples, as they continue to try and understand what has happened on Easter day. They might have been asking themselves, is it true? Has Jesus risen? The women said they saw Him, but could we trust them? Who can trust a woman anyway? Too sentimental, too emotional, their imagination always gets better of them. These are thoughts that might have been going through the minds of the 11 disciples.

In the last week's Gospel reading, Jesus came and met them, not once but twice so that they could all, including Thomas see and believe.

Today, we join the story as told by Luke. Here we have two of the disciples travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus. This reading places in front of us various unexplained facts and situations. It challenges not only our understanding but also draws us to a way of life that is radically different from that which our modern society wants us to follow.

The first of these is that of the disciples. Who were the two disciples that were going to Emmaus? And why? Luke did not tell us who they were, instead he wrote:

“Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him”

Who was Cleopas? Why did Luke thought it was important to name him unlike the other disciple that was said to be with him?

Many theologians have suggested that he was the brother of Joseph the husband of Virgin Mary. Is this correct? We will never know, one thing that we do know is though he was refer to as one of them, he was not one of the 12 chosen disciples. What then does this mean?

The second concerns the reason for their travels. Here they were, on their way to Emmaus, a village about 7miles from Jerusalem. In those days, there were no Phones, no Ipads, no laptops and no newspapers.

All travelers have, is each other, hence they talk and discuss. And this was what Cleopas and his unnamed companion were doing. Talking to each other and trying to understand what has taken place and why?

But on their own they were unable to put these pieces of the jigsaw together and make a coherent picture. It is possible that they were so caught up in their own concerns that they failed to recognise Jesus until he broke bread with them.

Luke did not give us a reason for their journey probably because he was more interested in what they did rather than why?

The third unexplained fact was their recognition of Jesus only when he broke bread.

Why did they only recognise him when he broke the bread? Did he say something familiar? Did he repeat the same words he said the Last Supper? Did the sharing of the meal relax them, and enable them to reflect more completely on what was happening? Was Jesus in some way transformed at that moment? I guess we would never know.

And the last, was the statement that Jesus vanished from the presence of the disciples. How did he do this? Was it gradually or immediate? What happened exactly? Many unbelievers and even some Christians have suggested that Jesus at this time was a Ghost/Spirit hence he could appear or disappear. Is this really so? Well this is another one we would never know for sure. One thing we are sure of is that the Risen Christ is living and well even today over 2000 years after the resurrection.

So this passage leaves us with many unclarified situations. And this if care is not taken beclouds us from seeing the intent of the Jesus and learning from it. What this passage should do, is to open our hearts, and our eyes so that we could, like Cleopas and his companion see Jesus and travel with him.

I want to suggest that this passage implores us to a reorientation and change of perspectives in at least three ways and for each way I will be placing a challenge for us to undertake this week.

Firstly the travelling should not be done alone. God has created each one of us for community. We are not made to be alone. Who are you travelling with?

There is a saying that if you want to travel fast should travel alone and if you want to go longer travel with others. Travelling alone is dangerous and unhealthy. Our society is more and more individualistic, as Christians, we are called to be countercultural.

We are called to be different, and this difference should be seen in the way we are open, welcoming and ready to travel with others.

Challenge 1:

This week, why not go out of your way to talk to someone on the train, at work, in the supermarket, while waiting for school pickup or wherever you have the opportunity. Be open, be accessible, and be friendly. Smile!

Secondly, in a world of Fake and Alternative news, we should be willing and able to discuss issues of society without fear of offending others. In the reading, the disciples did not clamp up when they were asked by the stranger what they were discussing.

Many of us would be too scared to discuss our faith, our belief or even our political opinion. This has led to a situation where many don't have informed opinions. Opinions are formed now more than ever by Newspaper headlines and sensationalism.

If there were Newspapers in Jesus' time, they would probably have labelled him a failure or imposter after his death.

Challenge 2:

If you are voting this week, why not take time to prayers fully consider and discern the presence of Jesus in the manifestos of the parties and candidates, instead of establishing your opinion on what the Newspaper headlines say.

The third is to have a hospitable spirit. We need to be charitable, ready and willing to be of service to others. In the reading, the disciples said to Jesus,

“Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them.

Without this invitation, they might not have recognized Jesus. Without it, we would not be talking about this story. Without it, we might never have heard about a little village called Emmaus.

Challenge 3:

This week, why not invite a work colleague to lunch with you? Or a neighbour for tea? Or organise a “bring and share” picnic with friends and challenge each other to bring another friend.

The Emmaus Road story challenges us to seek Jesus in all parts of life. To seek him and meet him in each other as well as those we meet as we go along our daily lives.

As we go this week, could I implore you to choose to do at least one of the suggested ideas, I am sure we will be meeting God in others as we do them. Amen.