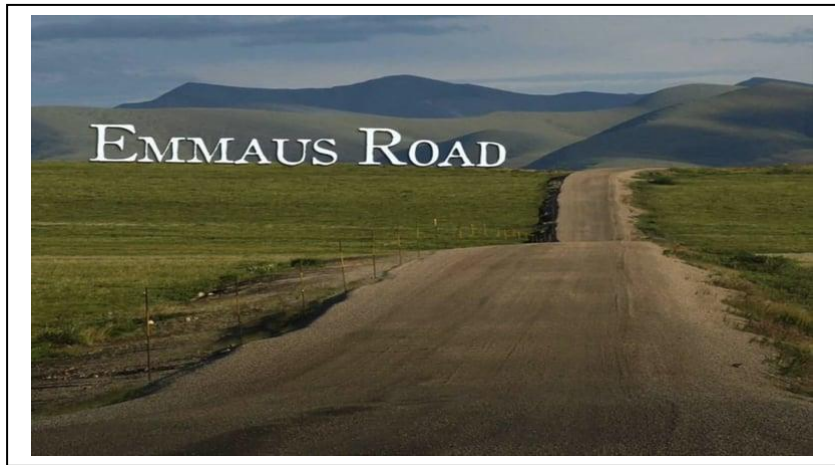


The Emmaus Road – Third Sunday of Easter



I've just come back from my post Easter holiday – mainly spent in Cumbria, in the North of England. The beauty of that area – the Lake District and surrounding country side is simply astonishing. Most people go to the Lake District to enjoy the scenery and to go walking in the fells and mountains. That's what, Tracey, me and Peggy my dog did – medium length walks of between 4 and 9 miles.

We walked to connect with nature, to see wildlife and landscape, to be caught up in the majesty of the mountains, to feel fitter, to get the city smog out of our lungs and to breathe that Cumbrian fresh air.

We walked to think and sometimes to pray. We walked so that we deserved that tea and scone at 4pm. We walked to feel alive.

But in today's gospel the disciples, Cleopas and his companion, walk because they have no choice – it's not a stroll, or a walking holiday – they walk the 7 miles to Emmaus because that's the only way they can get there – and because they are afraid.

Jesus their master, mentor, friend, boss, inspirer, go-to person, guru, wise man, Rabbi – the person who has utterly turned their world upside down – has captivated – with whom they are enthralled – has been brutally murdered and now his body has disappeared – with rumours of visions and angels and a story that maybe he is alive.

They walk to Emmaus – confused and perplexed.

They make a physical journey – that becomes part of their faith journey.

Now when we think about people coming to faith – or making a faith journey the road we often think about is not the Emmaus Road, but the **Damascus Road**: Paul's sudden blinding conversion – wham – bam – an encounter with Jesus that literally knocks him off his horse and causes a revolution in his life.

But what about the **Emmaus Road conversion**?



I think this is the more common story of our journey of faith. We too are walking – walking the journey of life – in discussion with companions, relatives, friends – making sense of who we are, of what is happening – thinking about God and faith, life and death, meaning and making sense of who we are... and we're walking – sometimes with purpose, sometimes in the wrong direction, sometimes knowing where

we're going, sometimes without a clue – but we're walking, we're walking like those disciples on that Road to Emmaus – and somehow Jesus walks beside us.

We don't know he's there. Just like Cleopas and his companion didn't realise. But Jesus walks beside us – leading and guiding, opening up wisdom to us, opening up faith to us, opening up the things of God to us – but we don't know he's there.

Isn't this more like our story of faith? That we are discussing stuff and thinking and wondering... and Jesus is walking beside us and we're not quite aware?

Now I have both elements in my faith story: the Damascus Road and the Emmaus Road.

As many of you will know, I wasn't raised in a Christian family. My parents were committed Marxists and agnostics at best. But when they were 40 years old, they both had dramatic, Damascus road style conversions and became

very committed Christians. In the light of their dramatic conversions, my sister and I also at 16 and 13 committed our lives to Jesus and had powerful experiences of Jesus' presence in our lives. Dramatic wake up calls – that made us believe and be faithful to Christ.

But from 28 years old up until today – it's the Emmaus Road that speaks to me most. I don't think that we are designed to convert once and that's it... I think that we travel on a journey with God – and discover things about Jesus all the time – that convert us again and again **back to who we should be in Jesus**. Each time growing more in faith and wisdom.

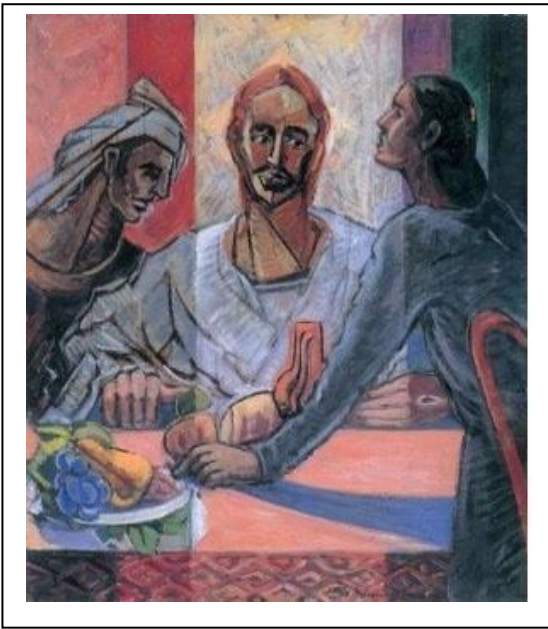
When I was a teenager I'd hear a phrase like that: "bring us back to who we should be in Jesus" and think that it was about converting us away from sin – and in a way it is – but not the sins that obsessed me as a teenager – not sex, drugs and rock and roll – but from all that is *anti the life* that God brings.

When we walk as citizens of SIN street – we put our ego in the middle, we focus on our own stuff, our own needs, we become selfish and indulgent, uncaring and pre-occupied. We grasp, we possess, we hoard.

But when we are citizens of a road that leads to a conversion, a transformation if you prefer – we are moved by God's love, we remembered that we are God's precious child, we remembered that we are redeemed, loved, saved, rescued, treasured – and that God's Holy Spirit dances within us – we remember that we are saved, so that we might love God and neighbour – and live our lives embracing justice, peace, hope, love.

But sometimes we have to walk on the Emmaus Road to get there. The Emmaus Road – where we travel in confusion and perplexity, where we are not quite believing, where doubt is stronger than our faith – a long, hard road – but on this Emmaus Road – Jesus walks beside us.

The other part of this story that I love – is that it says how "he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread". At the Last Supper – the institution of Holy Communion – Jesus uses the words "This is my body"; "This is my blood", but the disciples could not make sense of this action or what it meant. But here – in the village of Emmaus – as he breaks the bread – they realise that it is Jesus they've met with.



This is a holy and wonderful mystery – a sacramental mystery – that we too follow this pattern – that it is in the breaking of the bread that we realise that it is Jesus whom we have met with.

Easter isn't just one Sunday of the year. The Easter Season is seven Sundays of Easter Resurrection encounters. Seven Sundays for us to get our heads around

disciples statement "The Lord is risen indeed" – seven Sundays to transform us into an Easter people – moved and motivated by the power, life and grace of the resurrection – may Jesus walk with you on that road – Damascus, Emmaus, and all others roads – may he walk with you. Amen.

Sermon Notes: Revd Sheridan James (30 April, 2017)

