

Easter 3 18th April 2021

Luke 24:36b-48

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In Luke's gospel there are two encounters with the resurrected Jesus. The first is when Jesus visits Cleopas and another person as they are walking to Emmaus. The second time is shortly after, back in Jerusalem with the eleven and their companions when Jesus appears again.

There are two really significant commonalities between the two stories.

The first is *eating* and the second is *scripture*.

In relation to eating:

In the Emmaus story Jesus '*took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them*'. When this happened their eyes were opened and they recognised him.

In the second story *Jesus takes some fish and eats it in their presence*.

In relation to scripture there is also a striking repetition:

In the Road to Emmaus story Jesus says, 'O how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah (the Christ) should suffer these things and then enter into his glory? *Then beginning with Moses all the prophets Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures*.

In the second story Jesus says, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that *everything written about me in the Law of Moses [Torah], the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures*'.

We are being given two incredibly important things here. The first is that from the very earliest church, it was understood that Jesus is revealed first and foremost through Scripture, food and church as the Body of Christ.

We ingest God – we are fed by God in our MINDS and in our BODIES in the company of others.

The second important thing we are being given here is the KEY for perceiving God through the scriptures. When Luke talks about the scriptures he's talking about what we commonly, but probably incorrectly, call the 'Old Testament'. We ought not call the Hebrew Scriptures the 'Old Testament' because Jesus and the early church never calls it that. For Jesus and the early church 'the scriptures' was the Law of Moses (the first five books of the Bible), The Psalms and the Prophets.

As we know the scriptures a lot of stuff which is pretty unsettling - texts of terror and war. If we think we can just waltz into the scriptures and believe everything that we read in them about God is actually true of God, then we will end up with a very twisted understanding of God.

In BOTH of the resurrection stories in Luke, Jesus has to teach the first followers HOW to read the scriptures. *Clearly it was not self-evident*. If it was self-evident what the scriptures meant then Luke would not have had to teach the disciples as he did – and on TWO occasions.

What is made clear is that to read the scriptures properly – to hear what they have to say to us about God – for them to speak into our lives in a way which is life-giving and transformative – we need to read the scriptures as revealing and pointing to Jesus. In other words, we need to read the scriptures Christologically – through the lens of Christ. We need to read the scriptures BACKWARDS from Jesus.

And the Gospel themselves are an example of how the early church actually did this. We can get a pretty good insight into WHAT Jesus talked about on the Emmaus Rd and also with the eleven, because the outcome is that the gospels were written. When we read the Gospels and the letters we find them jam packed full of references to the scriptures, read in a Christological way. This reaches a zenith of sophistication in John's Gospel but we see it in the Synoptics as well. The gospels and letters are a record of how the crucified and risen Jesus was already being revealed through the Hebrew Scriptures, but we needed Jesus to teach us how to find him.

As a few quick examples, we find Christ showing up in the scriptures as:

- Creative Word
- Life
- Light
- Bread
- Shepherd King
- Suffering Servant
- Water
- Lamb of God (liberator)
- Sin offering (scapegoat)
- Mercy
- Loving Parent (Hosea)

Reading the bible Christologically means that if something is said of God which does not look like Jesus, it's most likely going to be a violent projection and human wish-fulfillment of the author. Texts of terror and war in the scriptures which use God to justify killing can now be seen more transparently for what they are....some kind of unconscious desire by humans to avoid taking responsibility for our own violence.

Reading Christologically we can now see God is not in the one ordering the killing but is suffering with those who are being killed. As the Israelites are led to freedom through the Red Sea and the sea closes back over the pursuing army of Pharaoh we can see the awful consequences for Egypt of being a colonising empire falling back on them as the water bog their chariots of war, and IN which can imagine God weeping for God's Egyptian children.

When God apparently orders the slaughter of innocent men women and children during the invasion of the promised land, we can see Christ being crucified. When the Psalmist cries for vindication against persecution and unjust suffering we hear the voice of the one whom the powerful would like to silence. When Israel nonviolently suffers the consequences of its faithfulness to God, rejected, hated and despised, we again see Christ crucified.

All of this is a radical overturning of our expectations – of OUR desires to be in control. So it is no wonder that it took a whole day of walking on the road to Damascus with Jesus for the two friends to start to get it. Only at the END of that day, when bread was broken as a sign of the broken body of Christ did recognition occur. And this is why Jesus tells the disciples to stay put until the Holy Spirit comes. Because the Holy Spirit comes as the ongoing teacher to them and to us about where and how to find Jesus in the scriptures and in our lives. Let us pray that we continue to be attentive to the presence of the Spirit of Christ in our lives, pointing us to the living Christ among us.