

## The Gift of Disillusionment

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Scripture: Luke 24:13-33

Father, again we continue in Your presence, Lord, and ask that You speak to us. Meet us, Lord, in our life as You met those two disciples so many years ago. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

This story is familiar to perhaps many of us; two disciples are walking back from Jerusalem. They are disappointed; they are dejected. It's been a horrible week and they are heading home. It's probably late in the afternoon.

Luke 24:13-33

*Now that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus Himself, came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing Him.*

*He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"*

*They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked Him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"*

*"What things?" he asked.*

*"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."*

*He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.*

*As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if He were going further. But they urged Him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So He went in to stay with them. When He was at the table with them, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, and He disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem.*

May the Lord bless the reading of His Word.

I don't know about you, but this is a passage I've read so many times. And each time, even though I know the story and how it ends, it still gives me goose bumps.

I was reading an article in Christianity Today a few months ago, during the Palm Sunday week. The author talks about the gift of disillusionment. He says that disillusionment is not disappointment; it is really that we've been relieved of an illusion that we were laboring under. And if that's what happened, then it's a gift. We believed something that was not right, and now we've been corrected in our thought process. For the Jews on Palm Sunday, the disillusionment for them was that the king that they expected, rode in on a donkey, did not go and overthrow the Roman Empire as they wanted and set them physically free. Instead He went to the cross and set them free from sin, death and from hell. But at that point of time, they were pretty much shattered, and they were bewildered by the end of that week, because it had not turned out as they had started. And yet, in hindsight, He'd actually freed them from the illusion of an earthly king and replaced it with the truth of a heavenly and risen King. So they were given the gift of disillusionment.

As I read that, I thought this is not a gift that is limited to Palm Sunday. This is a gift that the Lord continues to give us along the way, week after week, and it's a gift that He continues to give each one of us as we walk the pilgrim road. When we catch up with these two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they too are disillusioned. The words to the stranger that they say: "We had hoped that He was the One who was going to redeem Israel." Their hopes had been dashed, and they had been disillusioned. I wonder how many of us are there this morning – what we'd hoped for has not happened. We've prayed for a miracle, but nothing has happened. We thought that we understood the promises in Scripture, and we've even claimed them. But nothing's happened! Or we thought we'd understood a passage, but now, down the road, we are not so sure anymore.

### **ENCOURAGEMENT**

Before we look at how the Lord responds to them, I believe the Lord has a word of encouragement for us over here, because we too, like those disciples, are on the road to Emmaus. This is familiar territory for all of us. This is a road that every disciple walks along, day after day. There are times in each of our lives when, as Krish Kandiah says, "The one that we thought was our friend becomes a perfect stranger." But, like those disciples, He doesn't leave us in that place. He doesn't leave us on the road. He comes alongside and He walks with us. He corrects our misconceptions. He shares the meals with us, and He is still with us as He was with them till the end of the journey.

John Mackay, who was the president of Princeton Theological Seminary, in his 'Preface to Christian Theology' says that we need to see ourselves and our journey of faith from an appropriate perspective. What he means is that there are two ways that we can look at our life of faith, our walk of faith and bring sense and meaning to our lives. He calls one the 'balcony approach' and the other the 'road approach'. He sees both as symbols of the soul. What does he mean? He was a missionary to Peru for many years. Before he went to Peru, he went to Spain to learn Spanish so that he could minister in Peru. He noticed how Spanish families often gathered on the balcony to look down at the hustle and bustle on the street below.

Quite like Bombay when we were growing up and we would look down from the balconies. In today's houses, we don't have so many of balconies. The balcony represents an observation point that is some distance from what is actually happening. Mackay contrasted this with the existence of life on the road itself. "By the road," he says, "I mean the place where life is tensely lived, where thought has its birth in conflict and concern, where choices are made and decisions carried out." His point was that you and I are pilgrims on the road, and the Christian is not a

lone traveler. We are part of a group that is travelling together; we are part of the fellowship of the road, and the truth, he says, is found on the road.

Christian discipleship happens on the road. The balcony is a great place to be, but it is an ideal location. It's an intellectual aspiration that we can never really achieve in practice. We can't take a God's eye perspective on the big picture. We can't get ourselves out of the mess that's happening on the road below. We are in a place where God has placed us, in a certain time and place in geography and time of history. We can't stand above and see where it's going. We have to figure things out while we are on the road. Christians, you and I have our existence on the road and we have to accept the limits that brings. When you're walking on the road, you can't see much beyond the horizon of the road that is in front of you. We don't get to see the big picture. We're on the road and, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, you and I are travellers and we have no way of rising above the road. Sometimes the road itself rises up and you get a little glimpse of what lies ahead. But that's not often.

The promise that we have this morning from this passage is that we have the one who walks with us, who knows the way ahead, who has planned. He knows every bend that is coming in the road. He is the one who says that I walk with you on the road. Even as those disciples reach the end of their journey and their destination, the Lord is still ready to go further. He is not limited by your and my journey. He walks the road with us and whatever the destination, He will go and continue to be with us. What the Lord really does is He teaches us on that road, how to figure out, how to interpret what He has already given to us – the truths that He has in scripture.

We are familiar with the word 'mentor'. The word mentor comes from Homer's Odyssey, which recounts the education and formation of a young man called Telemachus, the son of Odysseus and Penelope. He is accompanied on his educational travels by his tutor whose name was Mentor, from where we get the word 'mentor'. This concept was further developed by the French philosopher, Francois Fenelon, who made mentor an embodiment of wisdom and reflection, someone who takes his learning and is willing to pass it on to younger people like Telemachus. Mentor did not reach Telemachus specific skills, but he helps him to reflect, challenges him to think differently and opens his eyes to get different perspectives. That's what the risen Lord did for those disciples and that's what He does for each one of us.

So, I would ask you the question today – who has the Lord brought alongside you in this walk? Who is there that can speak truth into your life, who walks the journey with you? Yes, the Lord walks with us and He promises to do that. But He also brings people alongside us physically, and He helps us. He brings people into our life who can be mentors. The road to Emmaus is not a road that is walked alone, but it's one that is walked in the fellowship of saints.

J. Robert Oppenheimer, known mainly as the father of the atomic bomb, said once, "The best way to send information is to wrap it up in a person." That's what God did when He sent His Son in Jesus. That's what the disciples experienced on the road to Emmaus, and that's what you and I can experience as well today. So, let's look around and ask who has God brought into our lives that can minister to us in that way.

## **TRUTH**

The Lord comes alongside and He doesn't leave them. He starts correcting them and He brings truth into their situation.

*vs. 25-27 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken? Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself."*

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see how the disciples were despaired, and the misunderstandings that they had, and how the Lord shared with them. But if we are honest with ourselves, how often we too are in the same place, even today! How much of our pain comes from not truly understanding or misunderstanding or not appreciating the truths that are in scripture?

Maybe some of you have come to church today because it's Sunday, and because it's the right place to be. But in your heart, there's a bit of a disconnect today. The faith that you grew up with doesn't really seem relevant any more, or it seems to be out of touch with the world that we live in or the challenges that we have. Perhaps, you feel that it is archaic? Or even oppressive or regressive? The disciples on the road to Emmaus were upset too, but the reason they were upset is because they thought the Bible or the scriptures were teaching something that it wasn't.

If you are offended this morning about something in the bible, may I give you three ways to approach the text as Jesus did with them that day, that might perhaps help you in this, or help someone else that you are talking to who has the same challenges.

### **1. Be patient with the text.**

For example today, many people in the world around, the pushback that we get, is that they are put off by the way they think the bible talks about women. They say – look at the Old Testament, look at the patriarchs. They practiced polygamy and they bought and sold wives. Is that's what the bible teaches? Are these your heroes of faith? But a careful study of scripture will show us that there were two institutions present in the time of Genesis that were universal in ancient cultures. The first was polygamy – a man having multiple wives. And the second was primogeniture – the elder ruled the younger and everything went to the elder.

Yet, when we look at scripture, and if we read Genesis carefully, we will find that in every account where this is mentioned, the bible brings to the surface the absolute havoc that this practice of polygamy wrecked in the immediate family and in society. Even in the case of primogeniture, in every generation we find that God favors the younger over the older – Abel not Cain, Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau. You begin to realize that scripture is subverting, not supporting, the prevailing institutions at that time.

If there are some passages that are troubling you, be patient with the text. Consider the possibility that it is not teaching what you think it is teaching. Continue reading; ask God to show you what is the message behind it.

### **2. Don't look at it through our cultural lens.**

The second challenge that all of us face is that we bring our cultural lens to scripture when we look at it. The disciples on the road to Emmaus misunderstood the prophecies about the Messiah purely because they were looking at it only from the context of the

redemption of Israel. It says in vs. 20-21 *The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.*

They weren't thinking about the salvation of the whole world; they had their cultural blinders on. They couldn't understand why Jesus did what He did. And you and I can so easily do the same.

Take slavery, for example. One of the common objections against the bible is that it condones slavery. Does it? You and I today would all agree that slavery is wrong. But then someone will say how Paul asks slaves to obey their masters. Isn't that proof that the bible condones slavery?

Yet, if we look at Paul's writings by themselves and look at the way he writes about the relationship between a servant Onesimus and his master Philemon. In Paul's time, the tale of slaves was very different. This is not slavery as we saw it in the seventeenth/eighteenth century; this was a form of indentured servanthood. A lot of the times, they were actually more educated than the people that they worked for. So they looked and lived like everyone else.

Historian Murray Harris says that in the Greco-Roman times, slaves were not distinguishable from anyone else by race, speech or clothing. Most of them worked for a couple of years, and then they worked themselves out and were free to go and work somewhere else after that. So what we think of the slave trade today, which is, people being taken forcibly, kidnapped on the basis of their race or sex is something that the bible unconditionally condemns. Which is why Paul effectively says, "If you can get free, get free."

Yet, looking at the situation in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, Wilberforce and others worked for the complete abolition of slavery because it could not be squared with scripture.

So we need to see what scripture is really saying to us and not look at it through our cultural lens.

### **3. Don't be offended if it offends.**

Sometimes we find that scripture offends the culture that we live in. Many today have a problem with what the Bible teaches about sex and relationships. Yet, when the Bible talks about 'turning the other cheek' and 'love your neighbor as yourself', we say, "Wow! How wonderful!"

But if you were to go to the Middle East today, they would agree with the Bible's teaching on sexual relationships, but they cannot accept the fact that you should forgive your brother who has hurt you. They have a shame-based culture and so they say forgiveness, as the Bible says, is crazy. Each one looks at it through their respective cultural lens.

So it is that I would submit to you this morning that if there is something offending you today, be honest with yourself. Why should our cultural sensibilities trump everyone else's? If the bible really is the revelation of God, and not the product of any culture,

but from God, wouldn't it have to offend and contradict every culture at some point? If there is something that offends you, I would submit to you that it is proof that it is true, that it is God speaking. Because He is supra-cultural.

Or there might be some of us this morning that believe everything and yet are disappointed with God. After everything, He seems to have failed you. It is interesting how Jesus responds to that. He says, "How foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have written." He doesn't say, "You poor guys! You've really had a hard week." Ho! He holds them to account for their lack of faith. It is sadly possible for many of us, especially for those of us who have been Christians for a while, to dig deep into the Bible and still miss Jesus in the pages. He brings us into these seasons so that we can really wrestle with who He is in us and get to know Him for who He is. If we don't allow the study of the word to transform our hearts, minds and wills, we will be rebuked by the Lord for not understanding His Word, because He never gives us understanding just for intellectual curiosity, but to change us from glory to glory.

If truth comes to us, and if we don't allow truth to work in our lives, further truth will not come until we allow that word to take root and work itself in our hearts.

## **FELLOWSHIP**

The Lord doesn't just walk with them on the road. He doesn't just correct their misunderstanding and their perspective. But he takes the time to go and actually share a meal with them. So, in addition to truth, we have a fellowship. The road is long and you and I get tired. Many of us who have been Christians for a number of years, know what that feels like from time to time. We need sustenance along the way and the Lord provides that for us, both physically and spiritually.

Elijah, after he had been on Mount Carmel, and he'd killed the 420 prophets of Ba'al. Then he is emotionally drained and he runs from Jezebel, one single woman. God then meets Elijah in that place and He sends an angel to feed him, allows him to rest for some time and then He feeds him again. Then He says, "Now you're ready for the road. It's a long journey ahead. You need strength for the journey."

The disciples too, as we read, walked about seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and that's a pretty long walk after an emotionally draining week. And the Lord not only feeds them spiritually on the road, but He actually blesses their meal. And it's in that meal that their eyes were opened. Meals in Jesus' day were not just about food. If you look at Luke's gospel, you will find that Jesus was always going to a meal, or He was at a meal, or He was coming from a meal. Sharing food was a way to demonstrate social acceptance with the other person. As these disciples sit down, suddenly the guest becomes the host, and He is inviting them to come in and share the meal with Him. He brings these two disciples to a new relationship and a restored fellowship with Him.

The Lord gives us His table that we meet around from time to time, and that He as a rest along the way, a spiritual stop that we can have and get strength for the journey ahead, a time to remember Him and to have a fresh vision of the risen Lord before we set on for the next journey.

I pray that even this morning, as we go out from here, we have a time that the Lord's been with us, and He refreshes us; He feeds us spiritually just as He feeds us physically, so that we

continue on our walk and we are ready for either a seven mile walk back to Jerusalem like these disciples, or a forty day walk to the mountain like it was for Elijah.

The Getty's did a remake of 'Beneath the Cross of Jesus' and they write:

Beneath the Cross of Jesus,  
The path before the crown.  
We follow in His footsteps  
Where promised hope is found.

God gives us the journey, but He walks with us. That's why the writer to the Hebrews says: "Don't give up meeting together." There is strength to be had in fellowship, both with the Lord and with each other. The Christian walk is not a lone ranger's path. We need the Lord with us, and we need each other. It is no coincidence that they recognize Him while they are having a meal, while they are sharing hospitality with Him.

I don't know where you are this morning. But wherever you are, I believe God's Word to us is that He walks beside you today, just as He did with those disciples. There is a home waiting for us at the end of the road. There is a banquet that He has prepared where we will one day see Him face to face. We will know Him and see Him whom we have loved. All our questions will be answered, like it was for them. And we will truly enjoy the gift of disillusionment as we look back on all those times our hearts burned within us and we finally know in full what we now only know in part.

Mackay, at the end of his book says, "If the road to Emmaus is still our road, the great companion who trod it then, treads it still, to lead the pilgrims of this twilight hour into the glory of a new dawn."

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you Lord, that You are the same yesterday, today and forever. And that You continue to come alongside us, that You walk with Lord. You have walked the road; You know every journey, every turn. You know all the pain that we face and Lord we thank You and Your truth and Your company is the same. I pray that this truth and assurance will be true for each one of us, that as we go out from here we would know that You walk with us. You will never leave us or forsake us until we see You face to face. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.