

Promises for the Resurrection Journey on the road back to Jerusalem

Reading: Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognising him. ¹⁷And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' ²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

First a recap from last week's reflection: Easter as Exodus.

Easter is a season and Resurrection is a journey. There is nothing quick and instant about it. Resurrection is an invitation to return to the beginning (Galilee Grace) to start over with Jesus. The hope is that with Resurrection Light we will have more courage to journey with Jesus into the shadows of this world's suffering. Free from the fear of death, Resurrection gives us courage to face the cruelty in the world and our own capacity to crucify. Facing this truth is the start of our liberation, as both perpetrators and victims.

The recurring temptation will always be to circumvent the consequences rather than to address the causes of the suffering. The cause of the suffering is directly related to exploitative economics. Exploitation simply understood as living without limits. Economics simply understood as the management of the household. Exploitative economics of plant and people rest on the illusion of separateness. All things built on the sand of separateness eventually wash away in self-destruction. Interconnectedness of everything and all is the bedrock of real reality that stands firm.

Exploitation of people and plant is the root cause of the plagues (self-destruction). Including our present plague: Covid-19. Plagues are the earth's rebellion against abuse. Each plague is a warning sign, telling us to stop and change and to start living life in life-giving ways. Resurrection is not about a death-defeating-never-ending-place in the sky for the dearly departed, but rather an invitation for the living to imagine and practice a death-defeating-economy that secures a life sustaining society where we can actually see the sky. I read this past week of how the City of Milan is demonstrating a beautiful example of change towards a life sustaining society: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/21/milan-seeks-to-prevent-post-crisis-return-of-traffic-pollution>

The Biblical name for this life-giving economy is Jubilee, where both soil and society are protected against all forms of exploitation by the policy and practice of Sabbath. Individual Sabbath practice is necessary for our own:

- integrity (alignment of our inner being and outer doing with real reality),
- education (learning through practice),
- humility (our failures free us from judging others), and
- witness (for us to see from each other what is possible).

Individual practice is necessary, but it is not enough to change the world. Public policy is needed to ensure systemic change (justice) is deep and broad enough for a life-sustaining-society, for example the policy of increasing social and child grants is small yet significant to offset ever-growing hunger in South Africa.

To practice Jubilee economics while living within the exploitative economy of the Empire, takes great courage and imagination. In the days of old there was a policy preventing people reaping to the very edges of their field or gathering the gleanings of their harvest or stripping their vineyards bare. The edges and gleanings belonged to the vulnerable poor. In other words, the vulnerable poor were minority shareholders of every business. [Read Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 15:7-11]. Example: Basic Income Grant.

Coming alive within a life-sustaining society, as wonderful as this sounds, will feel like we are dying. It will feel like we are dying because we ourselves are addicted to the Empire's Economics of Exploitation. All of us, to a greater or lesser degree, are dependent on the Empire's system for our survival that is killing us.

Our work in following Jesus is not to fight the Empire, but to slowly lay aside our addiction to the deathly ways of Empire. Laying aside the deathly ways of Empire is the long journey of Resurrection. [Read Wendell Berry's poem: Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front <https://cals.arizona.edu/~steidl/Liberation.html>]

This is the journey that the early disciples started on when they heard the news of Jesus' Resurrection. Morton Kelsey describes what may have been happening for the disciples: *"The disciples were suddenly confronted with a world in which God was more powerful than the Temple or Rome or any other power ... In other words, the world was how Jesus described it. They had never quite believed him ... and if this were true, then they had built their lives on all the wrong assumptions. If the resurrection is true then this world is not what it seems to be, and I may be called to follow the way of love revealed in this event"*.

No wonder their joy was mixed with fear. [Matthew 28:8]. For, it is a scary thing to realise that we have built our lives on all the wrong assumptions. This is the work that I hope we can continue to explore and practice as a community at CMM.

Some of this will include grief work of laying aside our dependence on Empire and journeying with each other through the stages of grief (“denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance” ~ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross). As we check the assumptions that we live by: the illusion of separateness or the real reality of interdependence; the illusion of scarcity or the real reality of abundance. We will encourage each other to bravely and imaginatively practice Sabbath. Ultimately our exploration and practice will be to love our neighbour as ourselves and to love the creation as our incarnate Creator. As we fall in love with our neighbour, ourselves, the creation and Creator, so our commitment to care for all transforms from a duty into a delight.

[To help us to fall in love with the earth, listen to Lindi Nolte’s poem: A Love Poem to our Earth: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWR86_YODaU]

I close with a few thoughts on the journey to and from Emmaus [Luke 24:13:35] which is the Gospel reading for this Sunday. I think the journey to and from Emmaus may give us clues to what we can expect on the journey of Resurrection.

The two disciples are walking away from Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the scene of the crime. The crime of state-sponsored-religion-blessed-crucifixion. Jerusalem revealed the power of the Empire to squash and annihilate any and every threat. The two were traumatised, overwhelmed and defeated. Never before had they felt so powerless. The Way that promised life now was dead – pegged to a tree. How could they have been so naïve?

Jerusalem also revealed the truth of themselves: They were not as brave as they thought they were. In Jerusalem their own denials and betrayal hid in the shadows. They preached a good sermon, sometimes to great congregations of people, but they stuttered when it came to living it out. The pointlessness of their lives began to settle on them. Too tired to be guarded and too raw to pretend to have it all together, they shared these hard-to-hold truths with each other (verse 14).

Jesus joined them while they were sharing with each other (verse 15). **This is the first promise of the text: Whenever we risk sharing with each other the hard-to-hold truths of this cruel world, Jesus will join us.** Whenever we admit to our fear and failure and sense of powerlessness to each other, Jesus will join us. Whenever we stop pretending to be what we are not with each other, Jesus will join us.

The second promise of the text is that Jesus comes uninvited. The two disciples were not praying for him to arrive. Prayer was pointless for them. They thought he was dead. And with his dead body their faith lay dead. Thus, there was no confession of faith by the two of them. Jesus does not join them because of their faith. He joins them out of his grace (initiating and surprising love) drawn to the vulnerability of their newfound truthfulness that “sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:27-28 and 35-39).

The third promise of the text is that Jesus is not into advertising and marketing his presence. According to the story, Jesus was not invisible but rather unrecognisable (verse 15). Jesus’ presence is always an enfleshed presence. There is no room to get spooky spiritual. Jesus’ presence is unrecognisable because he is not about himself. He doesn’t appear with a flashing neon sign above his head declaring his identity. His enfleshed presence is other-centred (verse 17). Before helping us to recognise him he helps us to recognise the truth of ourselves. Because of this enabling and healing work within our lives, our hearts burn (verse 32) or are simply “strangely warmed” although we are only able to articulate this connection after the event, perhaps long after.

The invitation of the unrecognisable Jesus is to remain open to discovering him in the flesh of all. "Christ is all and in all" [Colossians 3:11].

The fourth promise of the text is that theory must be incarnated within practice before we are able to recognise the incarnate Jesus. With their ignorance and foolishness exposed (verse 18-26) Jesus gives the two disciples a comprehensive revision course through the scriptures beginning with Moses and all the prophets (verse 27). Yet, even a bible study led by Jesus didn't open their eyes to recognise him. Theory taught by even the most divinely inspired teacher is not enough to open our eyes. However, Jesus' teaching did achieve (as all good teaching should) moving the disciples to explore and practice the theory freshly taught to them. They began to practice hospitality that the law of Moses and way of the Prophets proclaimed (verse 29-31). It was as they practiced trusting generosity towards the stranger that their eyes were opened. "Everyone then who hears these words (theory) of mine and acts on them (practice) will be like a wise person who built their house on rock" - the rock of real reality revealed by Resurrection. [Matthew 7:24].

The sign of a great teacher is never to overstay their welcome. A great teacher knows when to leave their students so that they do not become unhealthily dependent on them. For a teacher to say - you are now on your own - is a profoundly loving and affirming gift. So, Jesus vanished from their sight (verse 31).

That very hour the two disciples returned to Jerusalem (verse 33-35). The scene of the crime: state-sponsored-religion-blessed-crucifixion with our own denials and betrayal hiding in the shadows.

The fifth promise of the text is that all authentic encounters with Jesus move us to re-engage the Cross. Jesus finds us on the road to Emmaus but most importantly he inspires us to turn around and fix our eyes firmly towards Jerusalem [Luke 9:51].

As we continue on our journey of Resurrection, we too can expect these five promises to hold true for us as they did for the two disciples.

If there is any truth within these words - may it settle within our hearts.
Amen.

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