Liminal: living in the in-between #5

Learning to Listen

w/c 25 May 2025

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." (Reinhold Niebuhr)

Read Luke 24:13–35

The story of this couple and their, in the words of NT Wright, at times quietly comical, interaction and conversation with Jesus is one of the most engaging passages in the bible. Wright goes so far as to say that Luke uses this story as the central thread to convey his message about Easter and its meaning. There are journeys and then there are journeys. Are you currently on the Emmaus road or that back to Jerusalem?

As Jesus travels with these disciples on the evening of the first Easter day, we are reminded of his promise, "*…surely I am with you always…*" (Matthew 28:20). That evening it could only be with these two on this road; now it is with every believer on their own road wherever that might be. Take a few moments to reflect on this and its meaning for you.

Several commentators identify Cleopas' companion as his wife and also as one of the named witnesses of the empty tomb. (Luke 24:10). If so, had the negative reaction to her news (v11) caused the flight from Jerusalem at this most pregnant of moments? Or perhaps her departure is unwilling and the conversation Jesus overhears is her still trying to convince her husband of the reality of the situation. How might you feel in each of these scenarios?

Another thought is that the lack of a name for the second disciple is a strategy of Luke to encourage us as the reader to identify ourselves in that part and enter into the journey. How might that help your understanding? In what ways is this story a parable for our own Christian journey?

The distance from Jerusalem to Emmaus given by Luke translates into about seven miles (literally 60 stadia). Jesus therefore was probably talking with the couple for something over two hours. He was present but unrecognised. Do we have such times when we cannot quite see Jesus alongside us? How do we hear the words of Jesus as he joins with us in our walk?

Cleopas would have been steeped in scripture. Jesus' lengthy tour of the biblical prophecies was appropriate for him. He does the same for the remaining disciples later that evening (verse 45). What might the equivalent be for us when faced with a question or response from a friend or colleague along the lines of: "*I've heard about Jesus and I'm rather confused*"? How then do we create the necessary stories of and for our own time to reveal the gospel of the risen Jesus to a post-modern world? We thought last week about Jesus' statement that we will be witnesses. How then do our actions speak of the resurrection's truth?

As a follow-up to this, take a moment to imagine the journey (surely a liminal one) that we ask non-believers to undergo from the beginning of their journey to a relationship of faith. How can you paint a picture that portrays the end of that journey for them?

Many have noted the parallel between Jesus' reticence in verse 29 and his need to be invited in as portrayed in Revelation 3:20. However, here in verse 17 we see him take the initiative in opening the conversation. How do we judge when to speak and when to wait for a question or an invitation?

"Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world." (John Milton)