

## **REFLECTION FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**based on Luke 24: 13-35**

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At the heart of the Emmaus story is a wonderful moment of realisation, when Jesus' friends finally come to see that the person that they've been walking and talking with all day is their risen Lord. When the breakthrough moment comes it does so not as a big reveal - "Woo hoo, it's me guys!" - but gently, as Jesus partakes in simple pleasures with his friends once again; as he takes, blesses and breaks bread as he's done with them so many times before.

I love this. And for this reason, I'm going to lay to one side the subject matter of their conversation and all that reveals about the friends' upset and confusion and about Jesus and who he is. I'm going to ignore the slowness of Jesus' friends to recognise who they're journeying with and why this might be. And I'm not going to say anything about how this resurrection appearance fits in with all the others. As important as all of these things undoubtedly are, what I want to focus upon is simple pleasures and moments of realisation.

So picture the scene, if you will. Some friends are out walking together, talking as they go - they have a modest walk of about 7 miles mapped out. When another traveller comes walking down the track, and moves alongside them, they think nothing of allowing him to share in their conversation and journey. After an awkward, stuttering start, the rest of the walk goes well. They cover some ground both in terms of miles and conversational subject matter. As the afternoon draws to a close and they reach their destination, the friends insist that their fellow walker join them for the evening. They're clearly relaxed in his company as he is in theirs. To be honest, it now feels as if they've all known one another for years anyway. So he accepts their invitation and, with the night stretching out in front of them, they sit down to eat, maybe drink some wine and talk on.

I don't know about you, but I find that to be such an attractive picture and proposition - especially at the moment, when all of those things are beyond us. We can't go out for a decent walk with anyone beyond those in our own household and we can't come together around a table with friends.

All my adult life, these are simple pleasures that I've greatly enjoyed. I've loved times spent walking and talking with friends. I've loved meeting interesting people who've subsequently become great friends. And I've always loved sitting around a table, uncorking a bottle of something or other and chatting long into the night.

But even given my love of such activities, until very recently, the Emmaus-inspired picture that I've just painted would have seemed unremarkable. As special as such times have been for me, I think I've always understood these moments to be just part and parcel of life. Something that I get to do and enjoy from time to time.

But this pandemic has changed so many things. And now we find that even simple, very ordinary pleasures are beyond our reach.

Now, of course, we could at this point throw up our hands in despair and bemoan the fact that today we've been given a Gospel reading that cruelly reminds us of things that we're currently denied.

But actually, from the start - and for all its devastating effects and impact (and that includes over 20,000 deaths in the UK and over 200,000 worldwide) - this pandemic has been a wake-up call. It's forced each and every one of us to look at life (and everything in it - and for us that includes Scripture) in a different light.

And one positive to emerge from this pandemic is that it's highlighted the fact that many of us have taken far too many things for granted for too long, myself included. For all the negatives, recent events have helped us all to see what really matters. And what matters more to us than the people that we love? What is it that we most miss, if it isn't spending time with people that we love, enjoying simple pleasures together? And doesn't that then make these simple pleasures precious in their own right?

When Jesus breaks the bread amongst friends around the table in a room in the village of Emmaus, it is a God moment. I don't think anyone who believes the Bible to be a sacred text can disagree with that. It's in this moment that the risen Christ who'd previously been hidden from his friends' eyes is revealed, in this moment that those friends can give voice to what had been niggling somewhere within them for much of the day:

*'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'*

The claim of New Testament writers such as St Paul - and a whole history of Christian tradition - is that there's something of Christ in each and every one of us (e.g. 2 Corinthians 13: 5). What this suggests to me is that, when we come together and engage in such simple pleasures as Jesus and his friends did that day, that can be a God moment for us too.

In one another's company, Christ can be revealed at any time. Even if we're not expecting it, perhaps especially when we're not expecting it. We shouldn't think that this is beyond us, that Christ cannot make himself known to others through us because we're not good enough or don't know enough. It wasn't in the theological interpretation that he offered that Jesus was made known to his friends but in the simple act of breaking bread.

Moments of recognition and revelation don't have to be dramatic to be life enhancing and life changing. They can be gentle and take place in the midst of life, in very ordinary ways. The Emmaus story shows us that, just as it shows us that, even against a backdrop of heartache and loss, eyes can be opened to see things anew.

Now we don't need to be told that. That's our experience now. Everyday, we're all having to learn to see things differently. But, for us to understand that simple pleasures can be and are God moments, well, perhaps we'll have to look at God differently and at one another differently. It might be a bit too Lion King for some but...maybe if our first thought on seeing someone else could be, 'He lives in you...' that would be a good place to begin.

And if we start practicing this in our FaceTime, Skype and Zoom sessions - or by thinking it when we speak to someone on the phone - maybe when we can come together around a table to break bread and drink wine together once more (in church or anywhere else) we'll be better-placed to encounter the risen Christ that is in each of us and experience simple pleasures for what they truly are - exceptionally precious God moments.