**Encountering Jesus Sunday April 24 2022 Luke 24:13-49**

Some stories have an enduring quality. “Alice in Wonderland”, “Romeo and Juliet” “The prodigal Son” “Oliver Twist” The night John Wesley’s “heart was strangely warmed”.

The Israelites believed they understood the stories of their past, and the plans God had for them and looked forward to the time when God’s Messiah would emerge and lead them into a better future. However, their expectations were very different to what they encountered in Jesus. They really did not perceive what was going on around them through Jesus.

They needed to come to a place of openness.

**The Place of Openness**

They needed open ears. Throughout Jesus ministry they had heard him say things like this, ““Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.” But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

It sometimes takes time to take in what God is saying to us, we may not be ready initially. God works with our capacities, our limitations, God knows how to best communicate with each one of us.

I recall when I was experiencing my call to train as a Minister of the Word, I sensed that God was using various experiences and in them speaking quite clearly to me regarding what I should do. It was undeniably real to me but also somewhat overwhelming and it took some time for me to process how I could embrace and express this sense of call to others.

Jesus followers also needed open eyes. Luke describes the disciples on the road to Emmaus by saying that “their eyes were kept from recognizing [Jesus]”[[2]](#footnote-2), when they began talking with him. The conversation continued and finally as they shared around the table together, “then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Later as they were together with the other disciples we read that Jesus came amongst them and “then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures”.[[4]](#footnote-4) To understand who Jesus was they needed to understand the Scriptures and to understand the Scriptures they needed to understand who Jesus was.[[5]](#footnote-5) Overall they needed Jesus to reveal God and God’s purposes to them.

Jesus indeed did that for them. They moved from being “slow of heart” lacking understanding to ones who testified, “ “Were not our hearts burning within us[[k](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+24&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-26014k)] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” “[[6]](#footnote-6) Jesus was revealed to them, the Scriptures came alive to them, in part as they reflected back on the experience.

In our context we may often want others to come to a greater understanding of God, to enter into a personal relationship with God, to grow in their faith in God. We have stories and insights to share with others, and we should do this, but over and above all, they need Jesus to reveal God to them. This is the work of God in Christ, God draws us to God’s self and enables us to grow and change. We all need open hearts. Our openness to God paves the way for God to work within us.

**The place of Memory**

Sometimes we need to remind ourselves of what Jesus has said and done.

The story we heard this morning pictures two followers of Jesus who were clearly feeling confused and even dismayed. They remembered and shared with the ‘stranger’ who joined them regarding the extraordinary life and ministry of Jesus and his recent trial and crucifixion. They concluded, “[W]e had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

They thought God would redeem Israel from suffering, but God redeemed Israel through suffering, through the suffering of Jesus the Messiah.[[8]](#footnote-8)

They seemed surprised that this stranger did not know what had been happening, yet really the stranger, Jesus, is the only one who really does know what is happening.

Remembering has a significant role in nurturing and strengthening faith convictions. We read that “After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.”[[9]](#footnote-9) We often speak about the clarity which hindsight brings. This is true in the lessons of life, but it is also true of our ability to delve more deeply into matters, to sharpen or consolidate our understandings through remembering. Our familiarity with the stories of Jesus can help us to gain deeper understandings.[[10]](#footnote-10) I was reminded of some lines of one of our very old hymns.

*Tell me the old, old story, Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory, Of Jesus and His love;
Tell me the story simply, As to a little child,
Tell me the story slowly, That I may take it in—
Tell me the story often, For I forget so soon,
Tell me the story always,  If you would really be,
In any time of trouble, A comforter to me.*

*Tell me the old, old story: “Christ Jesus makes thee whole.”*

Some years ago research was done on what factors can be identified in the experiences of younger Christians who continue to grow in their Christian faith. One of the areas that was identified was the area of “peak experiences” these were times when strong encounters with God had taken place, encounters which stretched inspired and transformed those involved and these were celebrated. The Celts talk of the “thin places” places where people sense God’s presence particularly strongly. John Wesley’s experience of being assured of his relationship with God and having his heart strangely warmed would be such an experience.

Appreciating experiences of the presence of God in the past and in the present can nurture a vigourous spirituality, a vibrant faith. These encounters are challenging, often deeply uncomfortable, they often prompt us to make costly choices, they bring to our attention the practical realities of following Jesus example of humility, service and sacrifice.

**The place of Sharing**

Finally Jesus engaged with these followers in a place of sharing. The couple were sharing with each other as they walked, and then welcomed Jesus into the conversation. The conversation continued over a meal.

Meals were often the site for new revelation in Luke’s gospel. Jesus presence at the meal transforms everything. They had offered hospitality to a stranger, a common act, an act of generosity and welcome and in this context Jesus is revealed to them.

Jesus meets us in the ordinary places, even in the times when we retreat in confusion and dismay, when life is over whelming, Jesus comes to us in unfamiliar guises when we least expect him.

In the gospels we see that the risen Christ appears to those who were followers of Jesus and speaks to them. He acts in ways that point to the physical reality of his being; eating with them, asking them to touch him, cooking for them. Jesus’ resurrection appearances nurtured the faith of his followers.

 In what ways can we make ourselves open and available to God encountering us?

Are there some new ways in which we can encourage one another to remember what God has said and done for us in Jesus?

In what ways may God be challenging us, encouraging us or inspiring us?

God’s presence often “dances at the edge of our awareness and perception”. [[11]](#footnote-11) How can we seek to remain sensitive to God’s presence?

1. Luke 9:44-45 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Luke 24:16 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Luke 24:31 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Luke 24:45 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997) 844 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Luke 24:32 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Luke 24:21 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone,* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) 294 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. John 2:22 NRSV see also Luke 24:8; John 12:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Fred Craddock, *Luke,* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009) 287 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. R. Alan Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck et al. (Ed) *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volume,*(Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 482 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)