

**The Road to Emmaus**

One of the fun things about living in a remote community and learning an Aboriginal language is that you occasionally have “Aha experiences”. That’s when a penny drops, light bulbs flash, a piece of a puzzle falls into place. You make a discovery about something, in my case about the language or the culture, an insight that explains something I’d been missing up to that point. It’s very exciting when it happens — although not always easy to explain to somebody else!

Well I’ve had something of an “Aha experience” in preparing this message. A friend of mine shared an insight with me a few weeks ago, quite out of the blue, just as I was consider whether I would preach on this passage or another post-resurrection passage. More about that “Aha experience” later!

This evening we’re going to look at that familiar story in Luke 24 about the two disciples who were walking from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, a distance of just over 11 km. It was the morning of Jesus’ resurrection, the first Easter Day.

Let’s read it. So please turn up, swipe up or otherwise beam up Luke 24 verses 13-35.

<sup>13</sup> Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were **kept** from recognising him.

<sup>17</sup> He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> 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?”

<sup>19</sup> “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. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

<sup>25</sup> He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah **have** to suffer these things and **then** enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

<sup>28</sup> As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> **Then** their eyes were **opened** and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> 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?”

<sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup> and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” <sup>35</sup> Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread. (NIV)

I find this story fascinating. As I started to prepare this message, I felt the Lord was asking me to place myself in the position of one of these two disciples — to imagine myself as Cleopas, walking dejectedly away from Jerusalem, feeling utterly devastated, my dreams shattered. I assumed that I had been following Jesus for a couple of years, as one of the outer circle of 200 or so of Jesus’ disciples. I imagined myself following him around the countryside. I recalled the events that took place in Jerusalem between Jesus’ triumphant entry on a donkey a week earlier and the time of his crucifixion. I imagined witnessing those events.

I then wondered who the **other** person was, walking with me, whom Luke doesn’t name. Some say it was my brother-in-law. Some say it was my wife, who may have been one of the Marys, and who was present at Jesus’ crucifixion (John 19:25). And I wondered why we had **left** Jerusalem, leaving the band of followers behind?

I wondered how I would have **felt**, when Jesus said to me, “How foolish you are ...” That’s **tame** actually. In *The Message* it says, “So thick-headed! So slow-hearted!” I’m glad he didn’t say **that** to me! I suppose my hurt was soon countered by my growing excitement as pennies started dropping during Jesus’ exposition of the Scriptures — how so much of what Christians call the Old Testament refers to the promised Saviour. I was having lots of “Aha experiences” all at once! Lots of: “Wow. I’d never thought of it that way. How did I miss it?!” It was utterly overwhelming to have a personal exposition from the Author himself, and I didn’t realise it! No wonder we felt our hearts burning within us!

So I found it a most interesting exercise, to place **myself** in this story. Try it sometime with other Scripture passages.

### **Slide 1 ON - Map**

It isn't clear nowadays where Emmaus actually was. There are several possibilities, none of which is 7 miles from Jerusalem. This particular map gives the distance as about twice that.

### **Slide 2 ON - One Possible road to Emmaus**

But here's a shot of the remains of the Roman road that leads to the place most scholars currently favour as the likely location.

### **Slide 3 ON (blank)**

Now the usual line that preachers take with this passage is that Cleopas and his companion illustrate for us just how deeply even faithful Jewish believers had misunderstood so much of their Scriptures, our Old Testament. In the Scriptures the "**Messiah**", *HaMashiach*, was "the anointed one". He would be a **king**, descended from King David. He would re-unite the twelve tribes of Israel and re-establish the nation as it was during the days of its greatest glory under King David.

So even though the Old Testament doesn't actually say so, they were assuming the Messiah would be a **glorious, conquering ruler**, who would drive out the Roman oppressors and make their nation independent and great once again. Cleopas said as much to the risen Jesus: "*We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel*". It was totally **unthinkable** that their Messiah should not deliver their dream — let alone be executed as a common criminal.

Even the twelve, now eleven, **chosen** disciples were still missing the — point right up until after Jesus' resurrection. In Acts 1:6 they ask the risen Jesus, "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*"

We have hindsight today, of course. We have the teaching of Jesus and the other New Testament teachers. We might find ourselves wondering how they could have got it so wrong. But really, I doubt **we** would have thought any differently, had we been in their situation.

Not surprisingly, Jesus was aware of what the people were thinking. In John chapter 6, after he miraculously fed over 5,000 people, we read this: "*Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and **make him king by force**, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*"

During his ministry Jesus often made reference to prophecies concerning himself, especially when teaching the disciples. Then when he entered Jerusalem for the last time, he made certain that Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in the **manner** of his entry. Several hundred years before, the prophet Zechariah had described the arrival of the Messiah in Jerusalem. He would **not** be a conquering military leader riding a white stallion. No! He would be a **lowly** leader, coming in **humility** to **serve** and not conquer. In Zechariah 9:9 it says: "*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on*

*a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*" And that's exactly what he did. It's recorded for us in all four Gospels.

And what's more, the people **recognised** what he was doing! "*Hosanna!*" they shouted. Originally that meant: "**Save us!**" Later on it had come to mean: "**Salvation has come to us!**" Either way, they got it right. Both were appropriate responses to the Messiah. But in their minds it was still: "*Save us from the Romans!*" In the **Father's** mind he wanted them to be thinking: "*Save us from ourselves!*" — that is, from our sin.

Jesus' mission was to reunite the people with God their Father, and to deal with curse of sin. It was **not** to reunite them as a political or a military entity. His Kingdom is a **spiritual** one. God's plan had been clear all along. The thread runs right through the Old Testament.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a Jewish biblical scholar named Alfred Edersheim converted to Christianity. He wrote a classic work which identified **456** passages in the Old Testament that refer to the Messiah.

So . . . just imagine the **thundering** impact of the "Aha experience" Cleopas and his companion were having as Jesus was patiently unpacking all this for them! Pennies were dropping — more like manhole covers than pennies, I reckon — **CLANG!**

#### ***Slide 4 ON - Pennies and manhole cover***

That's why I found it so intriguing to imagine how those two were feeling — and to feel what they might have meant when they said that their hearts were burning within them! There's a delightful little piece of irony in the opening of their conversation. They asked Jesus if he were the only person in Jerusalem who didn't know what was going on. In reality, he was the only one who **did** know what was going on! The respected apologist, Ravi Zacharias, made that observation!

#### ***Slide 5 ON - Blank***

Several years ago, when Mike Mills was our Senior Pastor, we were working through the Gospel of Mark. Several times during that series Mike asked us the question: "*Are you disciple or just crowd?*" It was a very pointed question. In other words . . . are you seriously **engaging** with Jesus personally, or are you just going through the **motions** of church activity along with everybody else?

You see, up until this time I suspect Cleopas and his companion had been just 'crowd'. They'd probably been following Jesus for a couple of years, but they had not actually **engaged** with **who** Jesus really was. Nor had they engaged with the purpose of his coming. They were just crowd, following him around with a couple of hundred other regulars. But now, here, on the road to Emmaus, they were finally able to engage with Jesus **personally**.

In fact, it was **he** who sought them out! Did you notice that? And then at the meal table — in a **quiet place**, a **private place** — **that** was where they actually **met** with him for the first time. In **that** place their eyes were opened.

We've just sung that song, *None but Jesus*. It begins: "*In the **quiet**, in the **stillness**, I know you are God. In the **secret** of your presence, I know **there** I am restored.*"

Sometimes we sing another song called *In the Secret*. That one begins: “*In the secret, in the quiet place. In the stillness you are there. In the secret, in the quiet hour, I wait only for you, ‘cause I want to know you more.*”

It’s up to us to create that quiet space in our day so he can speak to us.

We often quote that verse in Jeremiah 29 which talks about the **plans** God has for us. But have you ever read the next couple of verses?

### **Slide 6 ON – Jeremiah 29:11-14a**

<sup>11</sup>For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. <sup>12</sup>**Then** you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will **listen** to you. <sup>13</sup>You will seek me and **find** me **when** you seek me with all your **heart**. <sup>14</sup>**I will** be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. . . .”

God says we **will** find him. But we have to be fair dinkum about it! Seeking him with all our heart is not a perfunctory, occasional activity. Neither is he keeping his distance from us. He’s **not** playing hard to get. He’s not picking favourites. He wants to bring us out of whatever “captivity” is a problem for us. **But** in seeking him we **do** have to be **findable!** We have to make ourselves available to him. If our spiritual earphones are unplugged then we aren’t likely to hear anything!

“God never speaks to me”, some Christians say. Is that because we’d rather not risk hearing what he might want to say to us? We forget that his desire is give us **hope** and **not** harm us. Why wouldn’t we want to hear something like that?

### **Slide 7 ON - Blank**

Last Sunday morning Nick Harder gave us a **fascinating** presentation about the ministry of **art** from a very personal perspective. He made the observation that being a Christian seems to involve being **crazy busy**, so much so that we miss opportunities to appreciate what’s around us, or to be **creative** in our thinking and doing. And so it **is** for many of us. How do we become like that? **I’m** guilty of it too. I can get so busy that I lose sight of the one for whom I’m supposedly doing all this stuff. How does that work? . . . It doesn’t!

I believe Jesus is **waiting** for each of us to create in our routines a **quiet** place, a **secret** place — that is, a place and time that is sacrosanct, when he can seek us out and be with us. He did that for Cleopas and his companion. He **sought** them out. He spent time with them and taught them . . . and they responded.

[Just as an aside, I’m uncomfortable with the term “Quality Time”. I reckon it’s been in our vocabulary for about 35 years now. What does it actually mean? It seems to me that some of us use it as a euphemism for “Not Enough Time”!]

This is a **challenge** for me. Sometimes I get it right, and I can sense that I’ve engaged with Jesus. Often though, I don’t get it right. So this is very much a sermon for **me**, folks. If it’s speaking to you too, then praise God for that!

You see, we will only clearly hear the voice of Jesus through his Spirit when we give him **time** and **undivided attention**, in a quiet place, a private place.

Imagine what could happen if each of us went into every day after meeting with Jesus in this way! Cleopas and his companion felt their hearts **burning** within them. They'd just walked 7 miles, 11ks. Now they did not hesitate to retrace their steps all the way back to Jerusalem. I bet they almost **flew** those 11ks. They were so eager to tell the others what they'd experienced!

### ***Slide 8 ON - Well***

And isn't this what Rod was exhorting us to do last Sunday night — to **drink deeply** from the **wells** of **salvation**? Drink deeply. No skimping there. No lowering the bucket half way and then pulling it up empty and saying, "That's enough for today". No saying, "I'll manage without the bucket". No hurrying **right past** the well thinking, "I'll look somewhere else to satisfy my thirst."

Remember our discussion about what it meant to draw water from God's well:

- spend time in the word;
- take the focus off ourselves to encourage the flow;
- learn endurance, graciousness and trust;
- gain wisdom, strength and victory over sin;
- rejoice in answered prayer.

I reckon Cleopas and his companion had a **full immersion experience** in the well of salvation.

[Talking about Rod's exhortation of us, I want to **strongly** encourage you to listen to his message from this morning's service, if you weren't there (and even if you were).]

### ***Slide 9 ON – Isa 41:10, 13***

I started out by saying I'd had something of an "Aha experience" while preparing this message.

A supporter of mine, a lady who's now retired, shared an insight with me a few weeks ago. She had been a nurse, who began her career in a remote community in Eastern Arnhem Land back in the sixties. The roads in those days were very dodgy indeed. Even today the area is cut off by road for several months of the year. The boat trip around the coast from Darwin was very slow. The nearest doctor was 700 kilometres away by air. She drew great comfort from these two verses in Isaiah 41. [*Read them*]

(v.11) So do not fear, for I am with you;

do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you;

I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.

(v.13) For I am the LORD, your God,  
who takes hold of your right hand  
and says to you, Do not fear;  
I will help you.

She wrote **this** to me: "Many times as a nurse in the bush, I was very conscious of God's help and His guidance and comfort as He offered His right hand — **or** He took **my** right hand — in the many difficult situations which arose for me. God says in Joshua 1:5 and Hebrews 13:5, '*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*' And he never did."

She went on to share with me how she started to ponder on the connection between these two verses in Isaiah 41. They sit close together on the page. One says, that God offers me **his** right hand. The other says he takes me by **my** right hand. One is a gesture of help; the other suggests walking together.

### **Slide 10 ON - Blank**

That led to a fresh consideration of our passage in Luke 24, about the two disciples walking to Emmaus. In verses 15 and 16 you'll recall that we read:

<sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus **himself** came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were **kept from recognising** him.

And then down in verses 31 and 32:

<sup>31</sup> Then their **eyes were opened** and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> 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?"

Notice that something **divine** is going on here. They were **kept from recognising** him until their **eyes were opened**. If Cleopas and his companion had recognised Jesus immediately, they probably would have bombarded him with lots of 'WHY?' questions — and may not have learnt a thing. Jesus wanted to have their **undivided** attention **first**. So they were kept from recognising him.

God certainly **does** walk along with us. He's always there, whether we are aware of it or not. And when we **meet** with him in a **private** place, he wants to **speak** to us.

But what does Isaiah mean when he refers to God's right hand and my right hand? If I were to walk along with him, and he took my right hand in his right hand, it would be rather awkward. Usually I would take the other's **left** hand in my right hand. So, if God were taking my right hand in his right hand would I be walking face to face with him. Would one of us be walking **backwards**?

Or is it that God is offering me a lift out of a place of despair? Is he taking my right hand in his and pulling me up? Maybe . . . but I am not always in such a place. I'm not always needing that kind of help.

Maybe I'm **dancing** with God, holding his right hand in my right hand — face to face with him, just enjoying his company? Well that might be rather fun for a while, but we'd be dancing round in **circles** and not getting anywhere.

This kind of reasoning is fun — but it limits God, doesn't it?. He is much bigger than I am. Much bigger.

So this was this lady's conclusion:

*GOD surrounds me from behind, enveloping me in His everlasting arms, and His righteous right hand comes down over mine to cover my right hand. And together, we walk.*

**In other words, we are walking as one!** And that's the "Aha experience" for me. God wants to walk as one with **me**. I've known that as a fact for years, of course, but now pennies are dropping!

### **Slide 11 ON – Isaiah 30 and Psalm 139**

This is reminiscent of another verse in Isaiah, a familiar verse, which suddenly makes more sense now — Isaiah 30:21

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears  
will hear a voice behind you, saying,  
"This is the way, walk in it".

Other verses start making sense too. Psalm 139:5-6

You hem me in – behind and before,  
you have laid your **hand** upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.

Cleopas and his companion were **walking as one with God**. God himself, in Jesus, came up behind them and was walking with them, telling them, in effect, "This is the way, walk in it". That's why their hearts were burning within them!

He **wants** us to hear from him! He wants us to give him a private place where we are able to hear what he is saying. Scripture tells us that!

### **Slide 12 ON - Blank**

I hope pennies are dropping for you, too.

### **Prayer**