

The Milestones to Emmaus

The Romans brought peace and order to the Mediterranean world. You could usually travel quite safely from one place to another in Caesar's vast Empire on well constructed, clearly marked roads. On a Roman road you always knew exactly where you were because it was craved on the milestones. Roman peace and order was written in stone all over the world. But Roman peace was a brutal peace, a peace and order carved in the flesh of conquered peoples. If nothing else, the crucifixion proved that Rome ruled the world.

The two on the Emmaus road are most probably a man and his wife, (for we know one is named Cleopas, but his companion remains unnamed in that polite ancient way of writing women out history). They walked, this man and his wife in the grips of a bone-deep numbness and shock. They have left Jerusalem to travel home along the Emmaus road -- a long day's walk. But they should be home by evening. They carry nothing but walk with heavy hearts. But in walking there is always a sense of relief -- that one is going somewhere, doing *something* gives them, a vague sense of *life seeking a new orientation*. Life, after all, must go on. They must pit distance between themselves and the horrific scene of the cross.

They talk, but it doesn't seem really seem to matter. They'd hoped -- believed -- that Jesus was Messiah. He was *supposed* to be the one who would redeem the Jewish people and bring them out from the cruel shadows of Rome into the victory of the Kingdom of God.

But now this torture and death are made all more stinging by the fact that their own religious leaders had conspired to bring it about. They are humiliated, but above all *fearful* of what's next.

It is the third day after Jesus' death on the Emmaus road and the world is a much darker place.

But it's it funny how an open road, even under the most repressive circumstances is still one of the few places where truly private conversations can take place. On an open road, a potential eavesdropper can be seen on approach, if keeps glancing over the shoulder. But this *stranger* has appeared from nowhere. There's a jolt of fear. How long has he been here? How much did he hear? And what did we *say that might condemn us?* The startled travellers fall silent.

But stranger -- the resurrected Christ is mysteriously unrecognizable. It's a curious phenomena. That he can go unrecognized by those who saw him heard him, been his followers. It not that he's hiding his face or his appearance altered. No, this simply a working of the Holy Spirit. The risen one will speak into their dislocated state. Wants to reorient them through the *Scriptures*, address their deepest doubts and fear with *what is written* so that when he departs physically they will know where to look for hope. They will spend this day companions, walking together as he quotes from the Scriptures. The Living Word of God that remains fixed and sure in an ever-changing world.

He is about to ascend to heaven, but they must remain in a world of death and violence, disease and poverty, domination and greed. This is their kingdom. But his kingdom is not of this world. But every Roman milestone reminds them where they live.

These are *the milestones on the way to Emmaus*.

Luke 24:27

What did he say? To them who live in live in the paradox of the Roman world, an empire of magnificent achievements city after city filled with the vanity of human glory, an empire of invincible armies rank on rank of lonely men, an empire where people talk much, love little, hate

often. What can the risen Messiah say that could make sense to two travellers on the Emmaus road? So he asks a simple question. . .

“What were you talking about back there?”

For some inexplicable reason they instantly give the stranger their trust. They stop. And the wave of grief that they’ve been trying to keep a few steps ahead of finally catches up with them. Deluges them, wraps them in its coils, a constricting snake and begins to squeeze and crush. As they stare vacantly into the dust.

Cleopas speaks first “Are you only a tourist in town who doesn’t know what’s happened?”

“O, what’s happened?”

“Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. But the chief priests – *our own* rulers handed him over and they crucified him. And *we* had *hoped* that he who would redeem Israel. And as if that isn’t enough, some of our women went to his tomb and now we can’t find his body. But they came back in wild hysterics about angels telling them he was alive from the dead. But some of us went to check and, the body’s gone. Not a clue.

Slow

Then the stranger said to them, ‘You know, your problem is you’re slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!’

On another day, they’d be offended by this. On another day, they’d take this stranger to task for such a tactless remark. Who does this stranger think he is?

But the unsolicited opinion does strangely seem fit the situation. Slow. Yes. That’s them. SLOW. *And they don’t have anything left with which to fight. The stranger is right. They just don’t understand.* O, they thought Jesus, the Messiah would overthrow Romans, reestablish the Great Davidic dynasty. From the throne in Jerusalem, the son of David who raise up invincible armies to swarm the earth. Israel would take its place as premier kingdom among men. They would be God’s blessed people, a kingdom of priests and kings, Rule, not be ruled. They would rule the world.

But how could they have been so thick? So stupid? What *fools* they *had* been, to think that a wandering rabbi preacher preaching love and peace could have done anything like that? That they a peasant rabble could change the world of Rome that built roads, launched ships, raised armies and ruled by force.

But then the stranger says something will forever stand as the turning-point in what it means to be the people of God: he says,

“The Messiah had to suffer . . .

Jesus knew these two were loyal. True. They *believed*. But they were slow of heart. They clung to vain ambitions of earthly kingdoms and powers. They had not grasped the BIG PICTURE.

But they have a long walk ahead of them today. So the stranger says, “I’m going to tell you a story. It’s a long story, but, we’ve got all day. . . Along the Emmaus road are markers – *millions* – one every thousand paces. Milestones. So the story begins unfold as they pass each milestones. Episode after episode. The stranger tells them, THE story. Explains to them *from the Scriptures* concerning the Messiah. This is the story.

Creation

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”. Order out of disorder. Good order, loving order out of a mind, a heart, an intelligence, a creative genius that is *good*, And created that which was Good. Very Good. God decides to become something he’s never been before -- a Creator of a universe. God gives being to beings like you and me. Order and beauty and life.

In the Scriptures, in the mysterious language of Proverb 8, *there was someone* there, in the beginning, with God, creating all things. Some call that someone “Wisdom”. Others say it was Christ. So the stranger tells the story and the travellers come to the first milestone, we can call it Creation. They walk on, and the story continues. . .

Crisis

There is no need to explain to the travellers, or anyone else in their right mind, that somehow this world lost it’s good order and ended up in a terrible mess. The question is , of course, where did this mess come from? How did we get into this mess? Who, or what, caused it? How did a *very good* creation get hijacked. The Scripture says the humans, created in the divine image, became too smart and too powerful for their own good. It’s an old story, we’ve heard it before. But on the Emmaus road it is all the more poignant. Adam and Eve go leave the good way of God to step beyond the limits they know they should keep within. They disrupts the original balance declared by God in the beginning to be GOOD. And they feel shame. And they feel *fear* because trust is based on the respect of boundaries, but now the boundaries have been violated and now everything up for grabs.

Trust is broken brother kills brother. Evil goes global. Human greed concentrated wealth, large infrastructures: Economies, kingdoms, armies. Cities rise on the lands that give peak production – the flood plains. And floods come. People drown. But some survive, reclaim the land, rebuild. They should have known better. It was only a matter of time until the BIG ONE came and a flood to end all floods destroyed everything. It’s what happens when we disconnect our story from God’s story, when we promote ourselves to a godlike status, build towers to the sky.

It’s only a matter of time before our world is ruled by the forces of domination. It’s a crisis that continues to this day. And so as the stranger tell his story, the second episode concludes as our travellers come to the second milestone: the first was the Creation, the second, let’s call it the CRISIS. But as the travellers walk on, and the stranger continues his story . . .

Covenant

What the creation needed at this crucial point, is a special people redem the world. Turn back the tide, restore the peaceable kingdom. Because the kind of people in the world were only wrecking the place. So somewhere on one of those vast flood plains of Mesopotamia, in a large magnificent city, the true and living God speaks to a man named Abraham.

(Gen 12:1-4a) And God several things to Abraham about his purpose. But the main thing was that God would make from Abraham that special people. And new kind of people, who, instead of wrecking the place through their greed violence and lust, would bless the world by just being there. God blessed Abraham so that he could *be a blessing*. And from that day forward, every culture has been be judged by it’s success or failure to understand this Covenant blessing. Whenever a nation assumes it is chosen only to *be* blessed and forgets what it means to bless others that nation, however great it once was, drifts away from God’s primary calling to human society. Heads back towards chaos.

But whenever any one man or woman -- like Abram the pagan man in the big city of UR of the Chaldee, answers the call to be blessed to be a blessing, that person is enrolled in the resistance

movement against evil in the world. That person wherever they are whoever they are lives with God in Covenant.

So the two travellers on the road to Emmaus have arrived at yet another milestone: looking back, there has been Creation, Crisis, and now *Covenant* . . .

Conversation

The story of Abram's descendants is get complicated. They far from perfect. It goes something like this: Abraham's son, Isaac had a son named Jacob who wrestled with God and had twelve sons who went down into Egypt and became slaves. Finally a man named Moses has a conversation with God and becomes the liberator and leads his people to a promised land. There they organize themselves under kings, some good, some bad, but all through the centuries God continues this *conversation* with this special people Israel. He speaks to them. Sends prophets and poets and priests and through his Holy Spirit speaks truth in love to this people. Calls them ack into the peace and order. The ongoing conversation eventually begins to be written down -- this ongoing communication with God becomes a Book one could read. And the stranger on the Emmaus road would remind us that this communication which became a Book points to something. To Someone.

And they reach another milestone. Creation, Crisis, Covenant and this latest one, *Conversation*.

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Christ

They are now more than half way to Emmaus. So far the story is not all that unfamiliar. But now the two travellers sense from the tone of stranger's voice that he has come to the most crucial episode . . .

The Messiah, the Christ, was sent to the world to restore the broken Covenant. The Crisis was something humanity could not solve from within itself. Humanity could never keep it's covenant with God. We needed to be rescued by God's grace. At the Cross, Jesus overcame our enemy which is death and in overcoming death, opened the door to eternal *life*. Just three days before when Jesus was so thirsty and in such agony on the cross he said, "Father forgive them for them for they don't know what their doing"

And now he is resurrected in proof that God has indeed forgiven. His blood is the blood of the New Covenant shed for the forgiveness of sins.

This milestone in God's story with us is called *Christ. But it is not the last.*

Community

The Village of Emmaus is getting closer, but there is still a ways to go. The travellers are beginning to realize that this stranger's story is *their* story. They are part of it. By simply being human they have been drawn into the story of God and his people. The story the stranger is telling them is putting them in touch with the real human condition: they need God.

Yet in this story they are finding the assurance of God's unconquerable love -- love that would draw God himself into the world. And in the company of this stranger, (who, remember, they do not yet realize is Jesus), they are finding a *sense of belonging* with the stranger. This story, makes sense of their lives. It deals with harsh realities but is nevertheless *good* news, not just for them but for the whole world. Everyone ought to know about this. Jesus was sent into their world to express to them in word and deed, the everlasting love of God. NOW THEY MUST COME TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH, SENT INTO THE WORLD BY JESUS TO EXPRESS IN WORD AND DEED THE SAME LOVE OF GOD.

Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." But not alone. This milestone is called *Community*.

Consummation

The little houses of Emmaus are now within view. Yet the stranger has one more episode relate. The story has a ending. The travellers on the Emmaus road are faced with a choice. For as a wise man once said, “All that is necessary for the forces of evil to win this world is for enough good people to do nothing”. Will they join the resistance movement against evil? Will they answer the call? Will they enter into the conversation with God? Will they become part of the community in Christ? Will they endure faithfully to the end?

Because this story is leading *somewhere*. Human history has been progressing like a baby learning to walk: the careful father holds up the little one and a mother goes to the other side of the room. Father lets the baby go, and the baby begins to move forward, not so much to *try to* walk, but to get to the mother and the gift of her presence that awaits just across the room.

And so the Scripture tells us, through sometimes mysterious visions, about the end of all things- the great wrapping up of human history. Jesus will come again. Just as he has risen, so too will we. The resurrection makes no sense unless it is merely the beginning of the great resurrection at the end of the age.

But the risen Christ is still a stranger to these two. How can he get through to them that God is calling them into a glorious future when we will be completely united with God, gathered into his holy presence, summed up, gathered up into the very heart and mind of God. And restored bodily? How can he communicate to them that all the guilt and shame will have been absorbed into God’s pain, the very pain that he himself felt on the cross. The great moral of this story is that *God forgives*. None of our sins and failings count will count anymore in the end, in fact, in judging our wrongs as evil and therefore worthless, God will actually *forget* our wrongs forever.

And so our travellers have finally come to the last milestone on the Emmaus road: *The Consummation*.

A long day’s journey is over. A story has been told except for it’s final conclusion. As they reach the outskirts of the village the travellers are overwhelmed with the profound impression that not only is this story *true*, it is the *their* story but it’s not quite over yet. Like a well-written mystery, there’s one more piece to fall into place.

So they’re quite surprised when the stranger acts as if he is going to keep on going down the road. “No, no!” they say, “Stay. Let’s have supper you haven’t told how the story ends.” So he went in and they say . . .

Around the the table

They begin to eat. The stranger takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it and as he begins to give it to them they realize how the story ends. Their eyes are opened. In one brilliant moment, they know who he is.

And then he disappears.

One looks at the other and says “You know, back there on the road today, as he kept quoting Scripture after Scripture, was it just me or did you have this wild stirring in your heart, like a stove getting stoked up to roaring blaze?”

“Yes!” the other says, “That’s exactly it. What should we do?”

They knew what they should *do*. They’d go back to Jerusalem. Tonight! They put the sandals

on, grab the staves and back-track down the road without a break. They get to the city, they find the Eleven and the moment they enter the room, they know *something* is going on here. This is just not the same disheartened group they bid farewell to this morning. What's going on here? Then someone says, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

And then the two travellers stand up and say, "Hey listen! Do we have a story for you! This is what happened on the Emmaus road today: a mysterious stranger walked with us all day long, and then this evening, as he broke the bread, we knew it was Jesus."

As a church, we believe whenever we break bread and drink the cup he's with us. This may not be the place where you personally are in at *your* spiritual journey -- and that's OK. You are more than welcome here as an observer. We would not want you send you away from this.

But consider this:

Is it possible that the same stranger who walked the Emmaus road with those two so long ago is now present here by the Spirit, saying "I am indeed alive. I am really with you. I will always be with you wherever the road may lead. But you may not be able to recognize me physically all the time. I may walk with you in the guise of a stranger. But you can always find me in the Scriptures -- this *MY story*. *MY BOOK*. And look can always look for me especially here at this table.

We're on the road. We are imperfect. Work in progress. But we are on the road to somewhere. But on the road to where? Is it the Emmaus road? Or has the church somehow wandered off into a wilderness? Off the beaten track, into quagmires?

Worship can become nothing more than an intellectual exercise. Dull and boring. It's entirely possible for hymns and rituals to be nothing but dead relics from the past. But the other sidetrack can be a kind of a gooey romanticizing of the relationship with God.

Worship is not a romantic experience with God, although it touches the heart deeply. Worship brings us great joy because it proclaims the power of Christ to bring us back raise from the great dislocations in our lives. Many things can dislocate us. Worship is relocates us back within the story that Jesus told on the Emmaus road.

This is a story about the renewal of human spirituality. It's about you and me experiencing *resurrection* spirituality. So much of what passes as spiritual life today walks past the same milestones over and over and over again, we never realize are walking around in a circle. The path doesn't take us anywhere.

On the Emmaus road, the two companions *go somewhere* with Jesus. We are on the road with Jesus. He walks with us and explains to us the meaning of his death and resurrection. And before you know it, we are at the table with him, breaking bread with him and *recognizing* him. And then running back to bear witness to him.

This is the pattern: We gather, we hear the story, break bread, then go forth to tell.

So I invite you to the Table. As a fellow traveller knowing we have all lose our way at times, all get dislocated somewhere on the Emmaus road. But Jesus meets us at our point of need, and our experience at this table changes our lives. Sends us out to proclaim the resurrection.

We, too, are blessed who are *to be a blessing*. He is here to bless us by his broken body and blood shed for the forgiveness of sin.

Amen.

