

Sermon 4 May 2014
Acts 2:14a, 36-41 Luke 24:13-35 'Companions on the Road'

Prayer: God of our journeys, as we follow the way of Jesus, open our eyes and our hearts to recognize him in scripture, in our lives, in each other, and when we break bread together. May we live in and share the light of the Resurrection, knowing that we journey with and towards you. Amen.

Thursday morning – I am in the middle of chairing the Northern Presbytery Council meeting and at 10:45 I get a text saying: “Looks like Maurice Williamson about to get sacked”. I get another one at 11:46 “yep he’s gone.” The news spread like wildfire especially in and around the “Pakuranga electorate” and **astonishment** started to be expressed at anyone who didn’t know the news. We know Pakuranga is not exactly the centre of the universe, but how could you not have heard??? CV

Well, we heard this morning from Luke (and only from Luke), we heard how two disciples – yes, they were because they were part of the group that the women reported the empty tomb discovery to. So, two of Jesus *wider* discipleship group were walking home after the traumatic weekend in Jerusalem. Luke only tells us about three people that day – but if you remember it was the ending of Passover and the population of Jerusalem was estimated to have increased from about 50 000 to 200 000.

I imagine there were a lot of people walking home but **our story** picks out 3, of which two had been with Jesus. So now these companions were walking the road home and **naturally are talking** about the ‘Breaking-News’ of **their** weekend. And we can still hear their astonishment that the alien, exile, stranger who *joined them* on the road out of Jerusalem **didn’t** know their news.

So they began their story and in the way of God, the bigger Jesus story wrapped around them, included them and kept going through them. As they responded to what God was doing in Jesus, recognised it as true for them, and talked about it, the more of God-in-Christ happened. God could and would do even more for Jesus’s story, because of them. cV

*Nicholas Lash in his ‘Theology on the Way to Emmaus’: “The Christian story is **latent** until someone tells it as her story of “the incomparable power of God’s transforming grace,” (as Auerbach wrote). That’s just the way it happens, Luke makes clear. Until then, it’s just information, common knowledge, rumour, speculation, possibility.”*

Until we recognise Christ’s story as being true in our lives – ‘breaking news’ remains just that. Until our lives are touched – in the disciples case with the burning hearts, ‘opened eyes’ and visual recognition, “Jesus ‘breaking-news’ story” will remain just that! **When** our eyes are opened and we see Jesus – risen Christ, **when** our hearts burn with Scriptural revelation, **when** we share at the table with Jesus **then** the power of God’s transforming grace is unleashed once again in our world both in us and through us. It becomes **our story** which we share with the stranger, alien, exile and person next to us at the table, or on the road.

It’s our story of walking with Jesus, our faith history, our hearts that burn, our eyes that see Jesus and us, that *like* Cleopas and companion **we want** to share / tell the good news – Jesus is alive and present with us on the journey of life. *I wonder* if one of the most loved bits about this glimpse of the early community is the image of Jesus – the companion on the road of faith and life with us. The title companion is especially powerful. It is far more than one stranger joining two others. The base words that make up the single word ‘companion’ come from the words for ‘with’ and ‘bread’.

Jesus sharing of bread with his two companions speaks to the centrality of our sharing communion as a faith community. It is fundamental to the way we know that sharing ‘bread’ deepens faith. Did you hear all the ‘com= with’ words? Com-panion; Comm-unity; Comm-union = **Jesus with us**, especially as we share in the hospitality of a meal, **taking** bread, **giving** thanks, **breaking** bread and **sharing** it.

Sharing, being hospitable is a constant biblical theme, constant call for God's people and Jesus followers and this story from Luke tells us that it has the power to transform our lives Petty says "if it opens our lives, if it opens our eyes even more than we have opened our doors. It's not simply a matter of being nice; hospitality is *justice* and *generosity* embodied, a spiritual practice that both requires and brings spiritual growth."

Another scholar out it this way: (K H-Matthews) "Hospitality isn't a condescending or begrudging, dutiful sharing (preferably from our excess, not our substance); **it is** an openness to change and a welcoming of the new learning change brings (however uncomfortable and perhaps even painful). Hospitality and openness make transformation possible, especially when brought to us from the most unexpected places by the most unlikely people, perhaps even by strangers. If we know that we must see Jesus "in the least of these," we have a clear mandate from him to share our table and its abundance with all who are hungry, physically and/or spiritually."

She continues: "In the church, we sometimes neglect both spiritual and physical hunger as we go about our "church business," or perhaps we have a thriving hunger ministry with our food pantries and hot meal programs, while unintentionally neglecting additional ways to feed the spirit. Yes, the spirit is fed when we are fully engaged in mission, but we also need times of quiet, of reflection and meditation, of deep prayer and meaningful worship, of spiritual growth through the arts and through nature.

As Anthony B. Robinson writes, "People want to experience the divine, the sacred, the holy. They are dying for want of grace, wonder, mystery, and *not for want* of by-laws, committees, and sign-up lists. At least they don't want those things instead of God" ("[From Generation to Generation \(or not\)](#)"). In what ways have you known hunger, both physical and spiritual? Who was the unexpected person who shared something with you, and in doing so, transformed your life?" Cv

Companions have the power to transform life – and today the Bible readings tell us how Jesus, as our faith companion with the grace of God transforms life, beginning with our own, and through us the world! An example of the power of the release of God's grace is described in numbers in the Acts 2 reading. When Peter shares the news of Jesus's story over 3000 people recognised its truth, felt the power of God's transforming grace, believed, repented and were baptised.

Peter's speech is very full and we heard from the beginning of it last week, narrowing our focus a little and picking up on the process he outlines I want to remind us all, that to repent entailed not only acknowledging guilt about what was done to Jesus – (assuming the 3000 would all have felt such guilt, which we might question) - but more significantly it meant "changing one's mind". (Loader)

To change one's mind is the core meaning of the word *metanoia*, translated "repentance". It is about **much more** than being sorry or feeling sorry. Believing that God had raised Jesus from the dead and made him Messiah entailed believing that **Jesus was right** in what he did and said. Luke has given us an account of Jesus' ministry. It fills out what Jesus was about. So repenting meant turning to embrace what Jesus was about, taking on a big agenda, learning that through his death, his life story became our life story as we experience what N Lash calls "*the incomparable power of God's transforming grace*".

When our life companions enable us to experience the power of God's transforming grace, we have our eyes opened to see the risen Christ, to believe, change our mind in order that we might follow him and walk in his companionship. Of course it also means ultimately, Loader says; 'to bear the Spirit as he did, and also in word and deed to declare hope for the poor, the hungry, the alienated, and the empty rich hiding in their trees.' It means to walk with all others on the road of life; to invite in, **take** bread, **give** thanks, **break it** and **share** that which gives life to us for the world, Jesus the Christ. Amen.