

**Text: Luke 24:13-35**

**Theme: Encounter with Christ on the Lonely Road**

**Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 03/04/2016 at 10:30 am**

There is a beautiful legend about a king who decided to set aside a special day to honour his greatest subject. When the big day arrived, there was a large gathering in the palace courtyard. Four finalists were brought forward, and from these four, the king would select the winner. The first person presented was a wealthy philanthropist. The king was told that this man was highly deserving of the honour because of his humanitarian efforts. He had given much of his wealth to the poor. The second person was a celebrated physician. The king was told that this doctor was highly deserving of the honour because he had rendered faithful and dedicated service to the sick for many years. The third person was a distinguished judge. The king was told that the judge was worthy because he was noted for his wisdom, his fairness, and his brilliant decisions. The fourth person presented was an elderly woman. Everyone was quite surprised to see her there, because her manner was quite humble, as was her dress. She hardly looked the part of someone who would be honoured as the greatest subject in the kingdom. What chance could she possibly have, when compared to the other three, who had accomplished so much?

The king was intrigued, to say the least, and somewhat puzzled by her presence. He asked who she was. The answer came: "You see the philanthropist, the doctor, and the judge? Well, she was their teacher!" That woman had no wealth, no fortune, and no title, but she had unselfishly given her life to produce great people. There is nothing more powerful or more Christlike than sacrificial love. The king could not see the value in the humble lady. He missed the significance of the teacher.

Often, we miss the value of those around us. I think it would surprise us to know how often we miss the presence of Christ just as Cleopas and his brother missed the significance of the stranger on the road to Emmaus.

### **Depressed**

Their confused mind had given rise to a fuggy sight. Their sadness had left them disillusioned and they were moving away from where their colleagues were- away from Jerusalem. Have you ever noticed that some of the saddest words in our language begin with the letter D? For example: disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despondency, depression, despair and death.

All of these words sum up how Cleopas and his companion were feeling as they trudged up the road toward Emmaus in today's reading. They had left the downhearted and confused band of disciples who were afraid and bewildered over what had happened to Jesus on Good Friday. The two men, as they travelled along, were also sad and disillusioned.

The Master they had loved and followed had been horribly put to death - a cruel and degrading death on a cross. Only a week before, their hopes had risen to fever pitch when the excited crowds welcomed their Master waving palm branches and shouting 'hosanna'. But now Jesus lay dead in a sealed tomb. Their hopes were dashed; the dream was over! Even the report of the women that Christ's tomb was empty didn't raise their spirits; it only confused them even more. The two despondent disciples walking the road to Emmaus summed up the situation very neatly when they said, "We had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free!"

### **Hope**

Human hope is a fragile thing, and when it withers, it's difficult to revive. We need to note the

number of people who take their own life because despair and discouragement have sucked the last bit of hope out of their lives. When someone you love and care for is overtaken by a serious illness, which goes on, and on, despair sets in. "We had hoped ... ", said Cleopas and his friend. "We had high hopes for the future, but now those hopes are gone and all we have left is disappointment." Can you identify with the feelings of these two disciples in any way? For each of us the cause of feeling down might be different, but it would be a rare person indeed who can claim that they have never been affected by any of those D words - disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, depression, despondency, ...

### **Jesus gets alongside them**

As the two men walked along, a stranger joined them. They were heading off in the wrong direction away from Jerusalem (v.13). Jesus was prepared to walk at their speed so that he could talk with them (v.15). Grace means we slip alongside many not walking towards Jesus or even interested in Him. This was going to be the most significant walk in their whole lives. The stranger asked them what they were discussing. And so they poured out their story to someone who seemed willing to listen. They tell the stranger all about their hopes and their disappointments.

The last thing they needed was a brisk "cheer up" talk, or being told to "snap out of it". He simply provides a listening ear. We know that the stranger was Jesus - but they didn't. It's a wonderful image - Jesus walking along the road with his despondent and confused disciples sharing their troubles? Suddenly this 2,000-year-old story is brought into the present. When disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despondency, depression, and despair fill our lives, Jesus is the unseen "stranger" walking alongside us, listening to us, and if we are willing to hear his voice, revealing himself to us.

### **He asks a question (24:17)**

In spite of their ridiculous answers, he does not laugh at them but graciously asks another one. They had wrong and misplaced expectations of the Messiah (vv.19-21) and their confused mind was leading them to unbelief (vv. 22-24). As Cleopas and his friend talked about the cross, their bewilderment and sorrow, Jesus reassured them and helped them. How did he do it? He pointed them to what God says in the Bible.

Luke tells us, "Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets". Jesus must have given the Emmaus travellers the best ever lesson on the Old Testament, reminding them how sin came into the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and how the prophets foreshadowed a saviour who would be obedient even to the point of death. He may have reminded them of Abraham - how he almost sacrificed his son - and how the heavenly Father did sacrifice his Son for the sin of all people. No doubt, he would have referred to Isaiah's description of the Suffering Servant of God who "was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53). It's not that these men hadn't read their Bibles, but that their understanding was clouded by the idea that the Messiah would come with glory and power and rain down fire on their enemies.

### **He challenges them**

He speaks the truth about himself plainly (vv. 25-27) and He helps them understand the good news.

The two-hour walk to Emmaus must have seemed like five minutes. The two disciples could feel the despondency and sorrow they felt in their hearts change into understanding and hope as the "stranger" explained that Jesus' death was a part of God's great plan of salvation.

### **Our Journey**

When disillusionment, depression and defeat dominate our lives, Jesus walks with us just as

he walked with the two men on the road to Emmaus. He points us to God's Word of promise in the Bible that tells us again that we are God's dearly loved children and that he will stand by us through thick and thin. He turns our despair into hope.

### **He eats with them**

The two disciples asked the "stranger" to stop with them for the night and at the evening meal he "took the bread, and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them". Suddenly it dawned on them who the stranger was. It was their Master raised from the dead. Jesus himself had ministered to them in their sadness. Now they knew why a change had come over them as they walked on the road. They now know why their despondent hearts had been changed to hearts filled with hope and renewed faith. Jesus had revealed himself to them in his Word and through the Sacrament.

I can imagine Cleopas and his friend standing in amazement; perhaps embracing each other in great joy, asking each other, "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" Their world had come together. They had experienced something of the grace of God. Because of his love for his despondent disciples, graciously Jesus came and met them on the road to Emmaus. Graciously he cleared away the fog of confusion; he showed to them the heart of God and his plan of salvation, and finally he revealed himself to them - he was alive, risen from the dead. At the moment the "stranger" reveals who he was, he vanishes from their sight. But he has not gone; he is still visible to those who have the eyes of faith.

### **They are changed (v.33)**

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem; their lives turned around. Their confusion was clarified and their fears were overcome. Their despair was dispersed and they proclaimed the truth about Jesus.

**The road to Emmaus is a symbol of the Christian life. It enables us to see that the risen Lord gives hope and joy, when all we see is disappointment, discouragement and despair. It enables us to see the world, not as a place of death, decay, and defeat, but as a place waiting, groaning toward God's final victory.**

This story about the walk to Emmaus is a story for everyday life now. If you are walking the Emmaus road right now or when you will walk it in the future with those sad Ds - disappointment, doubt, etc, let us remember we are not walking alone. The unseen "stranger", the risen Jesus is walking with us. Christ is risen from the dead! Christ is the Saviour and hope of the world! **When our Emmaus road is filled with discouragement and despair, let's walk it with Jesus. Walking with Jesus, our road will become a great highway of companionship, conversation, belief and hope. Amen.**