
Emmaus Road

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 27 April

Psalm 119:12-16, Luke 24:13-35



Why is it that sometimes, even when we're trying our best to trust Jesus it seems as if we are going it alone and God is nowhere to be found? At least that's what it feels like.

And there are certainly stories in the Bible were people of great faith and obedience still felt alone and abandoned at times.

The greatest example is Jesus who cries out from the cross, "My God, my God why have you abandoned me?"

For the first time in all eternity past there was a block as Jesus bore the sin of the world. For the first time in eternity Father and the Son could not sense the presence of the other. Jesus felt abandoned. But he still cries out "my God, my God". And at the last he says to his Heavenly Father, "into your hands I commit my Spirit". Faith not feelings governed Jesus actions.

Sometimes we do not feel the presence of God even when we want to with all our hearts. The two travellers on the Emmaus Rd give us a pretty dramatic example of that. Jesus was physically walking and talking with them. He was recognisable, even bearing some of the marks of crucifixion. And yet they didn't realise it was Jesus.

What of such times? It helps to remember Jesus promise to his disciples before his death. "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you".

How do we know? Pentecost. Jesus is with us by his Spirit and there is never a time that this is not true.

Even if one was cast into solitary confinement, it might look and feel like we were alone but that would not be the case. All that said there are times when faith is a struggle and we simply don't feel the presence of God. There can be many reasons for this.

In our gospel passage we get a literal example of Jesus walking with us and we are not aware of it. In the Emmaus Rd context the enemy of souls, the prince of darkness, was probably utilising circumstances, as he often does, to keep these disciples in the dark.

The little detail in the text that their eyes were kept from Jesus has supernatural overtones. We get a hint that this is more than an emotional, or psychological thing. Later in the story we read "and he opened their eyes". The supernatural is again being hinted at as Jesus overcomes the blinding work of the enemy.

From a story that shows us that Jesus is with us even when we might not realise it, I want to look at, and unpack just one vs because it shows us the way that Jesus is most usually made known.

Verse 32. The background.

Jesus has just supernaturally open their eyes and somewhat surprisingly he then vanishes from their sight.

The two disciples then reflected back on the effect of Jesus opened the scriptures to them.

Verse 32 "and they said to one another not our hearts burning with us while he was talking to us on the road while he was opening the scriptures to us."

I have sat in many churches and listened to many sermons over the last 40 years and I hunger for the scriptures to be opened in a way captivates and captures the heart and mind. I hunger for that sense of a burning fire within you as you hear the word of God proclaimed.

I think I have shared before the wonderful privilege I had in my mid 20s sitting under the teaching of Derek Eaton, still to my mind, one of the best Anglican preachers around.

I would literally be sitting perched on the edge of the front pew. Pen and paper in hand, bible in my lap, butterflies in my stomach, and a sense of both excitement, and fear as the word of God was opened.

- I was excited because it was God's word and I was thirsty like a sponge.
- I was fearful because I wondered how God might challenge me. What might he call me to do in response to hearing him speak?

In my case it was put myself through Bible college, sell my bookbinding business and apply to be ordained. It was to embark on the greatest, if not the most challenging adventure of my life.

There have been times for sure since those days when I have heard the Word unpacked in a way that warms the heart and has the hairs standing up on the back of the head. There have been other times when I have been left feeling frustrated and disappointed. That may well have more to do with me than the preacher for sure.

In the reformation the pulpit was shifted from the side of the church and placed centrally as a signal that the Word of God has priority in our worship.

And with the reformation there came a great renewal of faith and the Church impacted and changed society in a new and positive way as God used men and women of faith to open and expound the scriptures.

"We're not our hearts burning within us as he opened the scriptures to us."

Of course it was Jesus doing the teaching. But I'm sure Jesus wants our hearts to burn with enthusiasm and excitement. And Jesus still teaches as the Gospel is proclaimed, and Jesus is still at work as the Holy Spirit brings life to the word. We could also add God can and does use the most unlikely, undeserving, and unqualified of individuals to proclaim the gospel at times.

All that said would it not be the most wonderful and helpful thing that, as God's word is preached up and down this land on a Sunday morning, hearts and minds would be captured and captivated, and the hope and glory of the gospel would be made known?

May God open our eyes and hearts to the wonder of the gospel and may we get those moments where it seems as if our heart is on fire.

I'm sure our expectation has something to do with it. Do we expect to hear from God as we gather on a Sunday morning.

The two on the Emmaus rd, to be fair were not really expecting to hear from Jesus. Their expectation must have played some part in their inability to perceive and see and the enemy of souls may well have used that as well as he spiritually kept them in the dark.

So vs 32. Very briefly, Four thoughts that might encourage us as we seek to have Gods word be more engaging and impactful in our lives.

Firstly, it helps when we don't do it alone. By definition a worship service is a collective experience. A sermon is generally not preached to an individual. "and they said to one another not our hearts, plural, burning with us while he was talking to us, plural, on the road while he was opening the scriptures to us."

It was as they talked together and shared and recalled their collective experience that things hit home and they realised what was going on within them.

One of the great antidotes that help when we might not be feeling the presence of God, is to forget about how we feel, and concentrate instead on what might be happening for others. Remember the encouragement of scripture. When one part rejoices. All rejoice. When one part weeps, all weep.

It reminds us that the Christian journey is a collective experience. More often than not it is when we bear one another up that we sense the presence and power of God.

Secondly, it was a captivating experience. "Were not our hearts burning within us." If we have been captured and captivated by the gospel we will be expecting to hear God through his word and we will be better equipped to weather the storms of life.

Thirdly, it was a conditional experience. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that our natural spiritual blindness can be overcome as God does his work and helps us see and understand the truth of the gospel, and how that might apply to our own individual lives.

The more we understand our dependence and vulnerability before God the more earnestly and honestly we will seek him, and we will pray that he imparts his knowledge and light into our hearts and minds.

In the final analysis, Spiritual understanding is a work of God. If God has generously and graciously opened our eyes to the truth of who he is, profound gratitude can be the only appropriate response.

Fourthly, it was a compelling experience. When God speaks, we have to do something.

Those disciples on realising that it had been Jesus with them dropped everything and hotfooted it back to Jerusalem and whatever might await them there, no matter the cost. Their life took a 180 degree change of direction. That in essence is what it means to follow Jesus. If God captures and captivate our hearts and minds, we cannot but help respond.

One more thing and I mentioned it before. Expectation. The two disciples were not expecting Jesus to turn up. After all dead people, and especially crucified dead people, don't tend to join us for a Sunday stroll.

My point. When we expect to see Jesus work in our own, or others lives, the more likely we are to see it. Expectation can be something of a platform God can use as he makes himself known to us through the opening of his word. May our collective experience of the Word be captivating and compelling as the HS makes the Word alive to us.

A wee heads up as we close and as we are talking about God moving and working as the Gospel is proclaimed. For a couple of weeks leading up to Pentecost, I'm going to look at two topics. The promise of the Holy Spirit. The power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Then on Pentecost Sunday we will see how the promise was fulfilled and the power and presence was experienced.

Then after Pentecost Sunday I want to start a series looking at the first seven or so chapters of Acts. It's a very exciting story to see what happened when the Holy Spirit captivated the church and the church began to impact the city of Jerusalem and beyond.

Pembleton is a part of the beyond. "We're not our hearts burning within us as he opened the scriptures to us."

May God in his mercy speak to us and enliven our hearts and minds for action, Amen.

