

Along the track

Who Do You Say I Am?

The road to Emmaus is a beautiful story ([Mark 16:12–13](#) [Luke 24:13–35](#)). It is unusually long so, when Mark and Luke chose to include this story, they did so for a purpose. It was, in their view, something we all needed to hear.

The two companions were followers of Jesus. He had inspired them with both his message and his presence and but now they had left Jerusalem confused, disappointed, disillusioned, ready to abandon it all. They had walked with him, listened to him, laughed with him, got angry with the injustices he spoke about, they saw what a difference he made to the sick and the outcaste, how he ate with sinners, how inclusive the vision he preached and lived. This wasn't just some charismatic preacher – this was one who really engaged with people, the one who offered them hope, a vision for the future.

In short, they loved him. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people,” one of them said. Could he be the Messiah? Their hearts had burned within them! They had pinned their hopes on him. They could see a way forward. Instead, he has been crucified, a cruel death designed to inflict maximum pain and complete humiliation. Despite what the women who had gone to anoint the body for burial had seen, despite their message that Jesus was still alive, they just wanted to get away from it all.

The two followers are shattered firstly by the pain of their loss, the grief of losing a friend in such a brutal and callous way. A few short days before, people had hailed him as the hope of Israel, the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Then they turned and cried out for him to be put to death. Their loss of hope added further weight to their grief and disillusionment.

On this road to Emmaus Jesus listened to them as they poured out their sorrow and doubts. They were so blinded by grief and disappointment, so obsessed with their own agendas they could not even recognise who was walking with them.

Is that true for today too? Is that why Mark and Luke included this story, for the times we have felt let down, disillusioned, especially by the church that perhaps once made our hearts burn within us too? There are those who suggest that Jesus did not really exist, that he is rather a composite of the hero stories

of the Hebrew scriptures and other such legends in the surrounding cultures, something like our super hero stories. He was a myth.

Has Jesus become a myth for us too, in reality someone who is not real in our lives but just another story which evokes memories and offers ideas that may inspire us to do better, to be better?

The road to Emmaus is a story about Jesus and our need to come to know him, to spend time with him. So often our image of Jesus comes from some dreadful artwork, stories from our childhood, from ancient doctrines communicated in words we may not really understand. We learn about Jesus but we don't come to meet him, we don't come to know him.

On this journey, Jesus encourages these two followers to tell him about their anxieties and pains, why they grieve and mourn. But then he ‘opened’ the scriptures so that they could better understand the reason for the suffering he endured and its place in his life and message. In the words of Luke: And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. And their hearts began burning within them once again.

It is again not by chance that three of the four Gospels include Jesus asking the question: “Who do you say I am?” We can spend so much time speculating about theology or we can study the Bible in great depth but, in the end, each one of us has to answer for ourselves the central question of life: “Who do you say I am?” In the words of Pope Francis “It is important to study and to know. But knowledge alone is not sufficient. Rather, what is necessary is a daily meeting with the Lord, every day, with (like these Emmaus disciples) our victories and our weaknesses. Many times, Jesus turns to us and asks, ‘but who am I for you?’”

Regards
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