

“...were not our hearts burning within us...?”

A week has passed for us - a lifetime for Jesus' disciples – still, in Luke's account, it's the same day. After all the upheaval and amazement of the early morning; after the idle tales have been turned into stories of wonderment – after all that, there is still doubt – still confusion – still, the story of the resurrection has not been fully told.

The gospel describes two people – forlorn and confused; members of 'the Jesus crowd,' who are joined suddenly by a stranger. They know that the world has changed, but they don't yet know how radically the world has been changed.

Sadness and defeat hang over them like a cloud; their shoulders are slumped, their voices cloaked in anxiety and fear. What should they make of the stories that are racing through the community? How might they take some encouragement from the news that something incredible may have happened?

The stranger reads their mood and asks them what the problem is. They are so engrossed in how their lives have been affected that they can't recognize their teacher – and they are dumbfounded that he doesn't seem to share their concern, or their amazement, or have any knowledge of the events of the last several days. The two companions launch into a breathless re-telling of the recent drama. And now, three days on, there are these stories... a strange report from the graveyard –the rumours of life snatched from the very jaws of death. “We had hoped that he was to be the one to redeem Israel.” they say...

But their hopes are expressed in the past tense, and this is a habit that is familiar to us.

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We are often most comfortable with our stories of the ‘good old days;’ proudest of our dreams when they were freshest – sure of our destination when it was yet a long way off. And then the road we were on changed, and that expected destination faded over the horizon – became just another bucket-list trip that we didn’t get to take.

Our faith was meant to save us AND change the world. That was the promise; the Bible told us so. And still, it has been three days, or three years – or thirty – and that bold hope we once held is nothing but a memory of a promise not quite broken...

“If only...” we say, as we tell the story to ourselves and anyone willing to listen. If only the world hadn’t changed in ways we didn’t expect; if only the church had remained faithful to her message and mission; if only people still prayed, and Sabbath’s were held holy – then we would have seen glory; then we’d have achieved the dream of thriving churches and a civilized society. Things would be better.

On this first Easter day, as the daylight starts to fade, the tomb is empty, and Jesus is risen. The world was changed already, because Jesus was in it – but now, there’s no turning back. Yet even on this day, the problems that galvanized the collected hopes of the crowds around Jesus haven’t magically vanished. The Romans still rule. The religious leaders still cling to their certainties. People still live in fear of oppressive authority of all kinds. These two companions beat a retreat out of town; cowering under the shadow of their misunderstanding of the

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promises of God. In this moment, so deftly captured by the author of the Gospel, nothing in the world seems to have changed. And then Jesus speaks.

Jesus reinterprets their anxiety and reframes their understanding of the ancient texts. Jesus explains that the change God brings to birth is unrecognizable in human terms. There is divine glory at work in their midst – right next to them! – and Jesus chastises them for missing it.

Their version of history has not unfolded. Their self-absorption has closed their eyes, ears and hearts to the presence of the risen Christ.

Jesus lets them coax him into joining them for dinner. It is the simplest of things that brings light to the dark night of their souls; a blessing over bread. NOW their world is changed, for they have seen what they believed to be impossible. Jesus, in plain sight – and just as quickly gone again. In an instant, they found that they could see the glory of God at work in a world which, otherwise, was just as before. The Romans still rule. The powerful still flex their social muscle at the expense of the ‘ordinary people.’ Oppression and intrigue still dominate the day to day lives of too many folks, but these two travellers are now aware of an even bigger picture.

The way the world affects us can make life difficult. We are faced with decisions and deadlines – we are limited by circumstances and made to feel powerless by those who wield power like a weapon. They cry goes up ‘there’s nothing I can do!’ and soon enough, we believe that. Old promises fail to inspire. Our dreams – the notion that we would be vaulted from despair to delight without delay; the hope that some formula of faith would put us in the driving seat – bring us power

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and authority – these notions have not borne fruit. Our faith fuelled dreams were built on the wrong template. We have been fighting for a world where our ideas and ideals reigned supreme – which makes us no better than those who held power over us. We wanted control – but what Christ offers us is awareness.

Our intrepid travellers rush back to the city and tell their Easter story. Their eyes were opened with the breaking of the bread. Their perspective has changed – the power dynamic is shifted. They no longer cling to some notion of the world changed to suit their desires; they want to tell the story of God at work in the world AS IT IS.

The ‘romans’ are still in control – oppression is still rampant – there are wars and rumours of war sufficient to last many lifetimes. Religious certainty fuels despair and promotes judgement. It is far too easy to follow that well-worn path out of town, convinced – as those two, dejected disciples were convinced – that all is lost and nothing can be done. But Jesus walks with us. Christ is risen and the world has been changed. God’s justice and mercy – God’s patient loving-kindness – God’s promise is present, waiting on our awareness; urging us to open our eyes.