

The risen Jesus confronts his two disciples' loss: still a stranger, he re-interprets his disciples' experience of recent events in the light of the past story contained in scripture. He offers a different interpretation of the same events the disciples have described, one that tries to make sense of pain and rejection and brokenness. The dynamic, used in therapeutic counselling, is to stop staring at the present moment, the place of pain, and travel backwards into the old story in the hope that, seeing the new event in this larger context, one can understand not only what has happened but also what is going on now. In using the scriptures to reinterpret recent events, Jesus is illuminating the disciples' recent experience.

The risen Jesus' reinterpretation leads to burning hearts and an invitation to the stranger to stay with the two disciples: "But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them." (Luke 24:29)

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

The drama now moves from the road to the table: the house-guest now takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and hands it to the two disciples. In that action the disciples' eyes are opened to the revelation that their guest is the risen Lord. The stranger gives himself away by giving himself away in the breaking of the bread, something that continues to happen today in the Eucharist. This meal stands at the point where the whole movement of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is first revealed in its full significance, and as a pointer to how the Christian community will meet the risen Lord in the christological interpretation of scripture and in the breaking of the bread.

Thus a journey that began in confusion ends with revelation; it moves from hiddenness to openness. The scriptures were opened because of what Jesus said; the disciples' eyes are opened because of what Jesus shares with them. In the light of their new experience, the disciples are enabled to see their past experience as a source of significance rather than a memory of disappointment, as a word of life rather than a word about death. The word that Jesus spoke registered in hearts burning with joy.

In the light of their new experience, their recognition of the risen Jesus, the disciples again reassess their past: a recent past of injured hope is now healed in this fresh revelation. They are now able to understand why their hearts were burning within them. Their new experience enables them to make sense not only of the last few days but also why they felt the way they did on the road when the stranger was unfolding scripture to them. New insight can change our reading of the past. The recent and the immediate past are reappraised in the light of the new awareness and insight; they are liberated from their own tragic interpretation of the last days of Jesus and their own self-image as leftover disciples of a dead prophet.

EXPERIENCE AND MISSION

In the light of their new experience that they are disciples of the risen Lord, the disciples look again at their past: a recent past of injured hope is now healed in this fresh revelation. They are now able to understand why their hearts were burning within them. Their new experience enables them to make sense not only of the last few days but also why they felt the way they did on the road when the stranger was unfolding scripture to them.

Their new experience gives them a new sense of purpose and a new authority, so they go back to the place they longed to leave over their shoulder. Jerusalem is now their chosen destination, the same city they discarded earlier in the day. Even though the day is far spent, they go back; their return is not only to a place but, more importantly, to a community, one they presumably believe to be as wretched and desolate as they were at the beginning of their journey.

Their experience of the Lord sends them out of doors, on mission. They do not stay in Emmaus to build a monument to the place where they met the Lord: their experience compels them to share it with others as good news.

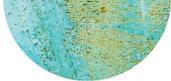
The structure of the Emmaus story gives us, the Christian community, a perfect reminder of coming to know Jesus as Lord in the Eucharist:

- the coming together
- the personal acknowledgment of defeat
- the hearing of the old story anew
- the gathering around the table
- the breaking of the bread
- the recognition of Jesus as Lord
- the renewal of personal discipleship
- the departure to share the new experience as good news.

Luke will move from the story of Emmaus, ever so gradually, to tell of Jesus' commission to the gathered group of disciples, his command to pray and wait, and Jesus' final departure which will end the Gospel. The evangelist ends the Gospel with a community that has a mission statement but is not

empowered to mission. Sometimes the only thing to do is to pray and to wait. Luke will bide his time, until his next volume, to celebrate the beginning of the mission in the power of the Spirit at Pentecost.

The story of Emmaus is the beginning of that journey to mission. When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist we too listen to the word of God and break bread together. Jesus comes among us not as the stranger; rather, he comes to us in word and sacrament to give us new hope to face the future with faith in him. Our own stories may not sound very different from the two forlorn disciples on the road to Emmaus: we too may be covered in disappointment; we too may have a past that bewilders and hurts us. But we are invited to tell our stories to the Lord, to listen to him as he speaks his word, to recognise him in the breaking of the bread and become one with him in communion. Only with him can we look with understanding at the past, and with hope look to the future. Only in his name can we share the good news with others. Only with him and the gift of the Spirit can we move from Eucharist to mission.



redemptorist
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