

S.P.A.C.E
Wednesday 7th April 2021
The Road to Emmaus

Concealed...



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...then revealed



Supper at Emmaus Caravaggio (1601) The National Gallery, London.
downloaded from <https://artsandculture.google.com/>

The two paintings on the previous page illustrate two different phases of this familiar passage. The first, a modern interpretation (*artist unknown, sorry!*), reduces Jesus to a shadowy figure walking beside the two disciples. Although we cannot see their faces the artist conveys the disciples' feeling of dejection and despair by showing them as two hunched, dark forms trudging across a barren landscape. The picture hints at the possibility of better things ahead as they are walking towards a brighter horizon, but for the moment they are unable to recognise the mysterious figure beside them, just as they had been unable to make sense of what had been happening in Jerusalem. They had gone up to Jerusalem with hope but were returning with disillusion. Their leader appeared to have achieved nothing, crucified as a common criminal. The truth was still concealed from them.

The lower picture is regarded by many as the definitive interpretation of the walk to Emmaus and it illustrates the climax of the story. Caravaggio shows the two friends at the supper table with their mysterious companion. A bright light bathes the stranger as he breaks bread. Caravaggio shows him looking down, drawing our attention to his hands as he blesses the bread. This was the moment of revelation: the mysterious stranger was revealed as their beloved leader, Jesus. The two fellow travellers' faces light up in recognition while the innkeeper looks on unmoved, unaware of the special significance of taking, breaking, blessing, and sharing bread. Interestingly Caravaggio shows Jesus without his customary beard, a small detail included to help explain the disciples' failure to recognise him.

Caravaggio's painting is a product of the Counter-Reformation. It shows Jesus being the first to perform the "priestly" role of breaking bread, a way of emphasising the importance of the Eucharist as sacrament. But the account of the journey to Emmaus has another more general significance, showing the interplay between words and action in bringing people to understand the Gospel. Jesus, while still unrecognised by his two companions, was happy to take them through the scriptures to explain what had happened to him. But even words patiently explained by Jesus himself were not enough to bring them to a full understanding. That came only when words were backed up by action - the simple but familiar action of breaking and blessing bread.

Both pictures include an empty space. In the upper picture there is room for at least one other figure to the right of Jesus. In the lower picture the fourth side of the table is unused, a fruit bowl placed tantalisingly close to the edge, as if to tempt the viewer to join in.

Luke's account makes clear that understanding the resurrection is not easy. He draws us into the story of two disciples, followers of Jesus who, having heard his teaching first-hand, had invested their hopes in this man. As they explain events to their unrecognised companion we are reminded that Jesus was a prophet (v 19), that his followers hoped he would be their redeemer (v 21), but he died, (v 20), and although he was rumoured to be alive (v23) he had disappeared from his tomb and their fellow disciples had not seen him (v24). At that point they seem to have given up and gone home. These two apparently sincere disciples who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem showed a common human weakness: they gave up when they could no longer make sense of what was going on and would have missed the significance of the Resurrection. Yet Jesus did not give up on them: he stayed with them as long as was needed to convince them by word and by deed that he really was alive.

Neither picture refers to the third part of the story, yet this is the crucial part. They stopped what they were doing, changed direction and went to tell the good news to their friends. That is the part of the story which we are invited to join in and be part of.

Prayer

They stood still, their faces downcast (Luke 24:17b)

Pray for those we know who are

sad, lonely or struggling in their relationships,
sick or bereaved,

or have found it difficult to cope over the last twelve months, for whatever reason.

Heavenly Father we pray that your church will walk alongside the downcast and troubled and help to reveal your love and presence to those who need it most.

Loving Lord, abide with us

And we will abide in you

...he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

Pray - *for ourselves...*

diligence in reading scripture,
greater understanding of what we read, and
the humility to recognise that there are things we do not yet understand.

...and for

those who teach or preach
those who struggle in faith or who look on without understanding

Heavenly Father we pray that your church will walk alongside people at all stages on their journey of faith, helping them along the path of greater understanding of your love for them.

Loving Lord, abide with us

And we will abide in you

Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him (Luke 24:31)

Give thanks for those who have helped us to grow in faith or understanding

Pray - that we may share in that sense of wonder

in worship, in prayer, and in fellowship

Heavenly Father, help us to see you in those we meet, whether in our homes, in our friendships or in our worship and as we do so may it fill us with joy and wonder.

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem (Luke 24:33)

Give us the courage to proclaim

to speak of our faith with sensitivity and sincerity
to speak out for what is just and godly

Heavenly Father we pray that we and all your church will proclaim the good news of the risen Lord Jesus with courage and authority.

Loving Lord, abide with us

And we will abide in you

Together:

Abide with us Lord, throughout this day.

Abide with us in our journeying, and in our homes.

Abide with us in our seeking, and in our longings.

Abide with us now and to eternity, Jesus, risen Lord,

who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit in glory for ever. Amen

And Communion

A moment to reflect on the times when we have not been loyal to God and His ways and have not cared for others.

In God's holy presence we call to mind our need for forgiveness.

Silence

**Father, our sin has brought you sorrow,
has harmed those who share our life,
has been hurtful to ourselves.
We dare not say we have only lightly sinned;
Yet Christ has taken to himself the burden of it all.**

In Jesus name may we be freed from the penalty and power of sin. **Amen.**

God of love and wonder, we sing your praises: with the great company of people, past and present, here and everywhere. We adore you, saying

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

You are indeed holy, eternal God and Father; in love greater than we can imagine you gave your only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have eternal life. Not as we would, but as we are able, we praise and thank you for the reality of his birth, the glory of his humanity, the generosity of his life: for his sacrifice on the cross, the wonder of his resurrection, and the assurance that he lives for ever to save us; for the gift of the Holy Spirit, for our calling to be his people, for the hope all can find in him.

**Remembering his life and sacrifice
we now come to his table
as he has invited us to do.
Send to us now, we pray, the Holy Spirit
so that we may indeed be your people,
and that as we share the bread and wine
we may share in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Amen**

Please wait in your seats as Pete will bring communion to us

Ending

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

The blessing

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always.
Amen

On the road to Emmaus

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognising him.

¹⁷ He asked them, ‘What are you discussing together as you walk along?’

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, ‘Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?’

¹⁹ ‘What things?’ he asked.

‘About Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.’

²⁵ He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

(Luke 24: 13-35 – a lectionary reading for today)

The next SPACE service in church will be on Wednesday April 21st.

The service sheet will also be posted online.