

Encounters with God – Peter Skelton

Let's have a look at the passage for today. In Luke's gospel the story is located on resurrection Sunday and immediately after the disciples' visit to the tomb. If you've already read it you could listen again or jump through a couple of minutes of this talk.

Luke 24:13-35 (CEV)

That same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to the village of Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they were talking and thinking about what had happened, Jesus came near and started walking along beside them. But they did not know who he was.

Jesus asked them, "What were you talking about as you walked along?"

The two of them stood there looking sad and gloomy. Then the one named Cleopas asked Jesus, "Are you the only person from Jerusalem who didn't know what was happening there these last few days?"

"What do you mean?" Jesus asked.

They answered:

Those things that happened to Jesus from Nazareth. By what he did and said he showed that he was a powerful prophet, who pleased God and all the people. Then the chief priests and our leaders had him arrested and sentenced to die on a cross. We had hoped that he would be the one to set Israel free! But it has already been three days since all this happened.

Some women in our group surprised us. They had gone to the tomb early in the morning, but did not find the body of Jesus. They came back, saying that they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive. Some men from our group went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said. But they didn't see Jesus either.

Then Jesus asked the two disciples, "Why can't you understand? How can you be so slow to believe all that the prophets said? Didn't you know that the Messiah would have to suffer before he was given his glory?" Jesus then explained everything written about himself in the Scriptures, beginning with the Law of Moses and the Books of the Prophets.

When the two of them came near the village where they were going, Jesus seemed to be going farther. They begged him, "Stay with us! It's already late, and the sun is going down." So Jesus went into the house to stay with them.

After Jesus sat down to eat, he took some bread. He blessed it and broke it. Then he gave it to them. At once they knew who he was, but he disappeared. They said to each other, "When he talked with us along the road and explained the Scriptures to us, didn't it warm our hearts?" So they got right up and returned to Jerusalem.

The two disciples found the eleven apostles and the others gathered together. And they learned from the group that the Lord was really alive and had appeared to Peter. Then the disciples from Emmaus told what happened on the road and how they knew he was the Lord when he broke the bread.

What surprises are there for those involved in this encounter? In fact let's extend the question to looking at how many surprises there are in the whole of the Easter story. Start yourself a list and discuss it with those you are with.

While you do that I'll leave you to it and I'll go and put on the Sunday roast.

Wouldn't we love to have the dramatic experience, never to be doubted, of an angel as at the tomb or Jesus appearing in Gethsemane or Cleopas and friend sharing bread and realising it was their saviour.

Even a lesser experience of a timely word of wisdom or an easy-to-interpret dream would boost our faith for at least a few weeks.

Maybe an inspiring speaker or a majestic cathedral experience is what we need.

Is there some mystical experience that you long for to lift you above the plodding, boring, ordinary existence?

Cleopas and his mate (not named) weren't the only ones not to recognise Jesus for whom he was. Think of

Mary in the garden, the crowd before Pilate in front of the palace of the Roman governor, one of the criminals on the crosses near Jesus and, no doubt, many others.

God does continue to appear incognito. A couple of Bible verses came to mind.

Hebrews 13

¹ Continue in brotherly love. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

Matthew 25

³⁹ When did we see You sick or in prison and visit You? ⁴⁰ And the King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'

It seems to be the ordinary where we can encounter God. For many it's in nature as we gaze in awe at the intricacies or majesty, the abundance or emptiness. It is in the breaking of bread. That might be by ourselves but especially with others (like we used to do in the old days, 2 months ago). Marie's story, which you can hear at morning tea or read on the Eden UC website, demonstrates the power to encounter God through a simple invitation and a special meal. We hear other stories of ordinary people achieving extraordinary things. Shouldn't we remain surprised by a life of addiction or depression turned around? The Bible stories show us that it is how we see the events or people as much as what happens.

Prayer: Forgive us our foolishness and resurrect our spirits so that we may see you in the breaking of bread, so that we may see you in our neighbours, and so that we may see you in the events of history and the events of each day.

Remove our blindness so that our eyes may be opened and our spirits renewed and our minds astounded. Send us scurrying to the Christian community to share our testimony, to tell of your power, to be renewed by the witness and confirmation of the stories of others. Then fill us all, O Jesus, with your words: "Peace be still," and send us forth confidently to serve this world.