

**Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse
Easter Sunday April 8th 2007
Luke 24:13-35 Burning Hearts and Opened Eyes**

Belief about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is crucial to being a Christian: Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:14 'If Christ has not been raised then our preaching is useless and so is your faith.'

Although sometimes it seems that, because Jesus had told the disciples about being raised on the third day, they therefore knew what would happen. But on that first Easter morning the fact that the women reported that the body had gone did not lead the two on the road to Emmaus to conclude that 'Christ is Risen'. Indeed it made matters worse, compounding their anguish about all that had happened to Jesus in the previous few days. It just did not occur to them that Jesus had been raised; in fact they were more worried about being arrested as his followers. As the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were approached by this stranger they might have wondered if he was a spy, but the one was beyond caring as he began to tell of all the recent events in Jerusalem. And it becomes clear that their disappointment is because, like many of the Jews they thought that he would be the one to redeem Israel. Israel was still under Roman oppression and the expectation was that in this Passover week God would intervene again and Jesus would establish God's kingdom. After all Jesus had been a great prophet, powerful in word and miraculous deeds.

But now they were walking away from Jerusalem, because Jesus had died at the hands of the oppressors and there wasn't even a body to show for it! As Frederick Buechner says in *The Magnificent Defeat* : "Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred: that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die; that even the noblest ideas that men have had—ideas about love and freedom and justice—have always in time been twisted out of shape by selfish men for selfish ends."

The Resurrection made the difference! They, like everyone else, had been looking at the Bible story through the wrong set of lenses, seeing it as God's story not of how he had set them free from suffering, but free through suffering. Jesus uniquely bore upon himself this suffering as Israel's representative. The whole story from Genesis to Chronicles points towards this, and the execution of Jesus was not disproof, but proof, vindication, that he was God's Messiah. God undoes the evil; in weakness and suffering he releases the world and brings it to freedom. The two disciples on their way to Emmaus did not recognise the story. You will only get it and have your heart opened when you hear the right rendering of the way the world is. It's our story too in that we share in His sufferings and then enter glory. You will recognise Jesus also when you stay faithful to the way the story is communicated to the Church.

On arriving in Emmaus they invited Jesus to stay whereupon he assumed the role of host. In contrast to Genesis 3 where eating the fruit opened the eyes of Adam and Eve and brought to them shame, death, decay and futility, here we have another meal where a couple, on eating with Jesus, discover that the curse has been broken, death has been defeated and the God's new world has broken in. It is the Great Reversal, not shame but dignity, because we are loved by the living God.

Through the Word and the Sacrament Jesus is risen in His Church – that's why Sundays are so important. Here we catch a glimpse of the world to come, our hearts are warmed, we are clean again and we can hope again. This is the Risen Jesus Christ and we can take this resurrection power to a dying world. Jesus has led God's people out of slavery, and now invites them to accompany him on the new journey to the promised land.