

LUKE 24: 13 - 35



Connect:

Share stories of what it is like to live under a brutal occupying power. Maybe you have group members who have lived (or whose relatives have lived) in Burma, the Sudan, in Cambodia under Pol Pot, in Eastern Europe or China under the Communists. Or perhaps you can share your knowledge of what it must be like from what you have seen or read or heard. Reflect together on the nature of hope and hopelessness in such contexts.

[Alternatively, you could ask the question: “What have the Romans ever done for us?” and critically evaluate your answers from the perspective of the lower classes in first century Judea and Galilee.]



Context:

This story is about a long downhill walk to the West of Jerusalem. Emmaus (later called Nicopolis by the Romans, or ‘city of victory’, 160 stadia from Jerusalem), is mentioned by the first century Jewish historian Josephus as the village burnt to the ground at the orders of Quintilius Varius (Roman legate of Syria in 6-4 BCE) because of a rebellion, and near where 2000 were crucified (see, Jewish War 2.4.3; 2.5.1.71; 2.5.2.75; Antiquities 17.10.9.291; 17.10.10.295). This mass slaughter by the Romans was a generation earlier than the events of Jesus’ crucifixion, but it lurks in the background of this story and adds poignancy to the shattered hopes of the next generation as they walk past the ghosts of these memories: “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Lk 24:21). What good could crucifixion number 2001 possibly bring them?



A Roman road and the ghosts of past crucifixions.

Luke 24: 21 - “We had hoped he would be the one to redeem Israel.”



Content:

Read the passage out aloud, and interactively, by assigning these parts:

[N] = narrator; [J] = Jesus; [C] = Cleopas; [T] = the two/they (Cleopas and wife?)

Luke 24: 13 -35

[N] ¹³ And so two of them, on that same day, were going towards a village thirty kilometres from Jerusalem named Emmaus, ¹⁴ and discussing with each other about all these things that had occurred. ¹⁵ And it happened that while they were discussing and arguing, Jesus himself drew near to walk with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were held back from knowing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them,

[J] “What are these words that you are exchanging with each other as you walk along?”

[N] And they stood still, looking gloomy. ¹⁸ Then one named Cleopas answered and said to him,

[C] “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not yet know the things that have happened there in these days?”

[N] ¹⁹ And he said to them,

[J] “What things?”

[N] They said to him,

[T] “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who became a prophet strong in work and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers handed him over to secure a death sentence and crucified him. ²¹ We were hoping that he was about to redeem Israel. But besides all these things, this is the third day since these things happened. ²² And even moreso, certain women from among us astonished us — having been at the tomb this morning ²³ and not finding his body — they came telling us that they had seen a vision of angels who say that he is living! ²⁴ And some of those with us went to the tomb and found it just so, exactly as the women said; but they did not see him.”

[N] ²⁵ And he said to them,

[J] “Oh ignorant ones — and slow of heart to have faith in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then to enter into his glory?”

[N] ²⁷ Then beginning from Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things about himself.

[N] ²⁸ And they drew near to the village to which they were going, and he appeared to be walking further on. ²⁹ And they protested, saying,

[T] “Remain with us, because it is evening and the day is already over.”
And he went in to stay with them.

[N] ³⁰ And it happened that while he was reclining at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and was giving it to them. ³¹ Their eyes were opened and they recognised him; and he disappeared from them. ³² And they said to each other,

[T] “Weren’t our hearts alight within us as he was speaking to us on the way — while he was opening our minds to the Scriptures?”

[N] ³³ And rising up that same hour they returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and those with them gathered together ³⁴ saying,

[T?] “The Lord has been raised up indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”

[N] ³⁵ And they explained what had happened on the road, and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.



Consider:

Choose some questions to discuss that interest you — and ask some of your own.

1 . Just how far did these two walk? The Greek texts alternate between 60 and 160 stadia (7 miles/11 kilometres, or 18 miles/30 kilometres). Many recent commentators favour the shorter distance because they can’t imagine anyone walking the longer distance twice in one day. Obviously, such commentators haven’t lived in the ‘two-thirds world’ or experienced life without convenient personal or public transport. There are two other sites claiming to be Emmaus that are closer to Jerusalem, but we should be wary of taking short cuts! Calculate how long this journey might take at a good walking pace (three-quarters of a marathon!), and then reflect on doing it all again, at night and uphill all the way back to Jerusalem!!

2 . The Gospel accounts of the resurrection show a variety of ways in which followers experience the reality of Jesus’ ongoing presence: through intuition (Lk 24:4–11; Jn 20:8); through ‘flesh and bone’ encounters (Lk 24:36–43; Jn 20:24–29); through visions (Lk 24:23); through mission (Mk 16:7; Mt 28:16–20); through ‘faithful doubt’ (Mt 28:16–20; Jn 20:24–29). Ultimately, in this wonderful story, it was not the warmth of the fellowship they experienced on the road (v.32); not the brilliant exegesis of Scripture by Jesus himself (v.32); but the breaking of bread together in table fellowship (v.30-1 and 35) that enabled them to see their risen Lord. Share with each other the occasions and experiences that have been ‘resurrection encounters’ for you.

3. In v. 34 — who is speaking? Is it the eleven and their friends in Jerusalem, or is it the two who have just returned from Emmaus? If it is the two speaking, does it imply that the companion of Cleopas is Simon? Some have argued for this reading to help clarify the mysterious verse 12. Most assume that Simon had shared his experience with the other ten before the two arrived back (since Simon seems to be numbered with the eleven), and they then tell Cleopas and friend the news. What do you think?

4. A better possibility for identifying the companion of Cleopas might be the suggestion that it was his (unnamed) wife. According to the custom of the day, the wife's name was not usually given (out of respect) when the husband was named — unless she was of particular significance or higher social status (as some suggest for Prisca/Priscilla and Aquila, for example). What difference might this make to our reading of the story?

Words & Phrases

v. 16: Their eyes were 'grasped by lack of recognition'! How hard it is to see when we're not sure what we're looking for! It is sometimes said to men by their partners: "Have a girl's look" (when they are struggling to find food in the pantry, socks in the drawer) But if Cleopas and friend are husband and wife, neither a boy's look or a girl's look saw this one coming!

v. 17: Were they just sad? The Greek word *skythropos* does mean 'serious- or sad-looking', but with a range of nuances, such as sullenness, gloominess, solemnity, embitterment, depression, sorrow, or melancholy. Which fits best, do you think?

v. 21: Indeed, we are still asking the same question as this — having been told in the first chapters of Luke that this One indeed would redeem Israel! (Lk 1:68; 2:38). How will/did/does this happen? Is it still only a future hope?

vv. 26-7: If only we could have access to these Bible Study discussions! It's not an easy thing to argue the suffering Messiah/Christ from the Scriptures, but there are some clues: the suffering servant songs, the rejected prophets, the rejection of Wisdom, the Son of Man traditions . . .

v. 30: How is it that the guest becomes the host, and breaks the bread . . . ? These actions (taking, blessing, breaking, giving) suggest the Lord's Supper (the 'Eucharist' or 'thanksgiving') — but note that the promise of Lk 22:18 is not broken.



Consequence:

This is where together we wrestle with what the Living Word of God is saying to us today out of our reading and discussions. The questions that follow here may not help — so it would be good to be ready to share some of our own.

1 . Our translations often soften the words for ‘discussing and arguing’ (v.15) and ‘exchanging words’ (v.17). Is there a place for ‘vigorous discussion’ in our Church life (and in our married life, if this is about Cleopas and his wife), and if so, how can we find a positive outcome to our ‘arguments’?

2 . Have you ever made time for a long walk (for hours) with your partner or close friend to discuss your hopes and dreams — including those that have been shattered? Don’t forget to make time for ‘table fellowship’ before you turn around and walk back!

3 . What is the nature of resurrection hope and reality? What is it that inspires these two to hurry back to Jerusalem — even though the shadow of Roman brutality remains for many years to come?

4 . Some scholars argue over the nature of the simple meal shared in Emmaus. Can it be the Eucharist/Communion when there is no wine mentioned? Could all meals be regarded as ‘Communion’ or ‘Lord’s Suppers’ — rather than only those shared in worship services? What might we lose, if so? Do we have to use bread and wine — even in those cultures/places that can’t produce either? Reflect on your own community’s celebration of the Lord’s Supper — and on your family meal and ‘grace’ customs. Are there ways we can keep these traditions real and simple and powerful — and focused on the unseen guest/host?