

[Luke 24:13-35](#)

One of the prevailing moods in our world at present is that of disarray and loss. There is fear and anxiety about the economy. Many are journeying through unexpected bereavement. Some are struggling with the way governments have imposed such severe restrictions on personal freedom – although for more introverted people, it may be a gift.

Churches are struggling with how to minister. How do you do a video service? What does it feel like to preach when you are only preaching to a camera, not to people? Can you do online communion, and if so, how? (Incidentally, the Methodist Church of Great Britain forbids it.) What about the digitally excluded, those who cannot afford or who choose not to have Internet-enabled technology?

Isn't it fitting, then, to come to the reading about Cleopas and his unnamed companion on the road to Emmaus and note the sense of disarray and loss that they are experiencing? The hopes they had placed in Jesus have been dashed by his crucifixion. What will the future look like now? Is there any hope for the future?¹

Jesus does three things in this story that progressively lead to the Emmaus Two finding hope and joy instead of despair. Those three things can help us, too.

Firstly, Jesus *listens*

He asks Cleopas and his companion about the events in Jerusalem that have distressed them. Now of course there is irony and not a little humour in the fact that Jesus is playing along with them here. It cannot truly be said that he doesn't know what has happened. But he gets them to open up their thoughts and feelings. And like a pastor, he listens.

Now you may think that when Cleopas and his friend pour out their litany of crushed hopes and despair that this is unworthy of them. Surely, they should be people of faith? Well, Jesus will address that. But initially, he listens, and even though the unbelief that comes out may be painful to him, he is big enough to cope with it.

And the good news is that Jesus is big enough to cope with us bringing to him our pain, sorrow, and questions. The Psalms are full of people writing hymns of lament to God. Don't forget we have the Book of Job in the Bible, where the best thing Job's comforters did for him was when they first arrived – they

stayed silent at that point. And the way we know Jesus is big enough to absorb all this is that we just have to look back to Good Friday and see him stretch wide his arms in love on the Cross. Jesus may not justify our lack of faith, but he is the best and the safest person to whom we can bring it.

So, don't be afraid to express your troubles over the coronavirus pandemic to him – or any other troubles. By all means talk to others, but make sure you tell him, too.

Secondly, Jesus *interprets the Scriptures*

Yes, Jesus tells Cleopas and co that they have been too slow to believe the prophetic hope in the Scriptures. Many Bibles say in verse 27 that Jesus 'explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself' but a better translation than 'explained' is 'interpreted'. Jesus interpreted the Scriptures in light of himself, because he was the fulfilment of the prophetic hope, he was the fulfilment of Israel's hope. I don't believe he just shot a few proof-text verses at them, I believe he showed them how the whole grand narrative of God's dealings with Israel and the world came to a climax in him.

A New Testament scholar called Ian Paul puts it like this:

So the Scriptures make sense of Jesus—but Jesus is also the only way to make sense of the Scriptures.²

I always remember how Bishop Festo Kivengere, the courageous Christian leader who stood up to the tyrant Idi Amin of Uganda in the 1970s, told a story of how he was given a few minutes with some of Amin's prisoners before they were to be publicly executed in a football stadium. He wondered what on earth he could say that would make sense to men imminently facing such a fate.

As he did, he felt he heard the voice of Jesus speaking to him. 'Tell them about me. I'll make sense.'

So, can Jesus who is the climax of the Scriptures help us in our disarray over COVID-19?

Surely the Jesus who was born into the mess and pain of this world can. The Jesus who came to deal with the groaning of creation can. The Jesus who said that natural disasters were not necessarily a judgment from God but still a warning to repent can. The Jesus who died an unjust death at a relatively

young age can. The Jesus who rose from the dead as the first fruits of God's new creation can.

Thirdly, Jesus *breaks bread*

As a young Local Preacher, I remember preaching on this passage and latching onto the thought that Jesus was revealed to Cleopas and his companion when he broke the bread. I took that as a sign of us meeting Jesus in the breaking of the bread at Holy Communion.

And of course, the old hymn 'Be known to us in breaking bread, but do not then depart' makes that assumption, too.

But although Jesus does the same four things with the bread here that he does at the Last Supper – he takes, blesses, breaks, and gives the bread – that doesn't mean that this points forward to the Church's celebration of the sacrament, for those four actions were performed by Jews at ordinary meals as well.

What we have here is a revelation of Jesus when he breaks bread, and there is one other occasion in Luke's Gospel where that happens soon afterwards. It's the Feeding of the Five Thousand, which is followed by Peter's recognition that he is God's Messiah³.

Now the Emmaus Two know that Jesus truly is risen from the dead, and that this changes everything. They see him for who he is, what has happened, and what God has done. This gives them the energy to return to what has been the place of confusion and despair, Jerusalem. Only now, the resurrection of Jesus has cast everything in a new light.

And it does the same for us. The coronavirus crisis has exposed our fear of death. I am not suggesting Christians think 'death is nothing at all': we still call it 'The last enemy'. But the end of this old creation in death leads us to wait for the making of all things new in God's new creation through resurrection. And so, we can even face this enemy with hope.

¹ These opening paragraphs are inspired by Alan Roxburgh's blog post 'The Emmaus Road' at <http://alanroxburgh.com/2020/04/the-emmaus-road/>

² Ian Paul, 'Meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24)' at <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/meeting-jesus-on-the-road-to-emmaus-luke-24/>

³ Luke 9:12-20. See the Ian Paul article above.