

FINDING FAITH

Luke 24:13-36

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As many of you know I watch Top Gear, as show noted more for the antics of its presenters than about motor vehicles. A favourite in Top Gear is the Cheap Car Challenge, where the presenters each buy a cheap car and then they are put through a series of punishing exercises, often in exotic places. One was to drive over the Andes from the Amazon jungle to the Pacific Ocean having bought cheap elderly 4x4s in Peru.. Here are a few seconds that recorded their traverse of the World's Dangerous Road in Bolivia, which claims more lives per mile than any other road. Not surprisingly, it's called the Road of Death.

ROAD OF DEATH FINDING FAITH

Life is like a journey and usually the route is not smooth and straight, rather like the windy one in the slide behind me. For most people it's a road of death because if we choose to travel through life without God, we drop off the side to an eternity without Him. It's a life and death situation and it faces every man and woman.

However there is a verse in the Bible, 2 Peter 3:9 which says: *He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* Repentance simply means turning around and going God's way and doing everything His way. And He's patiently waiting for all those who don't know Him to turn around and walk with Him whilst they have the opportunity. He wants all to come to repentance but we know that all don't. But in Jesus, the Good News is that the opportunity is there today, now for everyone.

I also said that the task of telling people the Good News about Jesus is given to the Church, the people of God. It's a commission given to all of us. There is no plan B or other method. People get to know about the Christian faith because someone has told them. I spoke last week about the need we have to look again at our mission as a church and how we reach out to others in our community. It is our imperative and possibly for many people, their only connection to the Christian faith is one of us. How do we reach them?

I mentioned that one of the necessities for us as a church is to recognise that our culture and our language changes and we must change how we present Good News to people for them to understand us.

That said, most people come to Jesus through just one route. What is it? It's through the witness of Christian they know. How we live and what we say counts. God has already placed into your life someone (one maybe more) who doesn't know Jesus and needs to know. That's how it is. That may instantly make you feel inadequate. Me? How can I possibly do that? Friends, make friends. How many people have you introduced because they have been mutual friends with you? If you're a friend of God, then we introduce Him to our friends.

How? This is where we need to learn from the Master. No definitely not me: THE master and for today's master class I give you the Road to Emmaus.

ROAD TO EMMAUS

I said we need to adapt the message to communicate with our language and culture, but actually this is a 2000 year old way of telling people about Jesus and it still works perfectly. So Jesus met these two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus – about eight miles. We only know the name of one disciple: Cleopas. Was the other his wife? We don't know. So what do we learn about Jesus' meeting with Cleopas plus 1.

Emmaus was a GOD-ARRANGED appointment. What happened was meant to happen. Jesus wanted to bring these two into a unique experience of Him. All Jesus had to do was turn up and meet them.

SHARING JESUS STARTS WITH GOD How do we start to share Jesus with people? Allow God to show us

those people He wants us to be a witness to. Actually that's usually pretty obvious. You see, each one of us already witnesses to those that don't know Jesus. In what we say and do in our everyday lives. Our life speaks volumes about what we believe even before we open our mouths.

What's your life saying?

As we realise who we witness to allow God to burden us to pray regularly for them. Someone once said "All great moves of God can be traced back to a praying person". Changed lives start with Christian people who pray.

JESUS CAME TO THEM As the two walked along, Jesus meets them and engages them in conversation.

JESUS CALLS US TO GO

So how do we share Jesus with people. We start by being with them. As I said earlier, friendship is the biggest ways in which people come to know Jesus. The reason is that friends trust friends and true friends look out for one another's welfare.

So pray for the opportunity to share Jesus with them. There are two descriptions often attached to this kind of prayer – we pray for ripe fruit, divine appointments. All salesmen say that the best kind of customer is one that comes to them. We have a God who brings people to us when we ask Him for that – and they come ready to have something imparted to them.

JESUS STARTED WHERE THEY WERE

It was Jesus who met them on the road and walked with them. He initiated conversation "What are you talking about?" They looked glum, downcast – Jesus couldn't not comment. It was a question with a "what's the matter" tone to it. These were glum people – they needed to talk and when they did it all came out. What's interesting is that they had already heard stories of Jesus having risen, but they went home before they could find out for sure what it was all about. They were two confused people and Jesus knew He could solve their confusion.

WE MEET PEOPLE'S NEEDS So principle 3 is that we start where people are. Jesus met a need. When we decide to commit ourselves to praying and opportunities to reach out to someone, usually the first move isn't just telling them the Good News. My experience is that people need to be on the right place in their journey to cope with the challenge of the Good News. Often the beginning is just caring for someone's needs. It needn't be a big thing – a lawn to mow, shopping to get, a shoulder to cry on. Sharing Jesus with people often means starting by sharing His love. Burdened about someone? Don't know where to start with them? If God doesn't give you an opportunity to speak, then take the opportunity to be Jesus to them.

JESUS LISTENS AND STARTS FROM WHERE THEY ARE.

So Jesus starts talking to them. Actually He doesn't cut in and say, guys you've got it wrong. He listens carefully to where they are.

WE LISTEN AND START WHERE THEY ARE

The art of listening is more important than the art of speaking. Any counsellor will tell you that. It's really important – even more so if you have been trained in sharing your faith. These days one size does not fit all. Read any book on how to share your faith and the assumption is always there that people believe in God and have some knowledge of Jesus. But we have a generation of people (30-40%) of the population who doesn't believe in God and have odd ideas about Jesus. The starting place is answering the question "is there a God?". How do you witness to an atheist? We'll see in a minute that sharing Jesus is a supernatural event. Sometimes the best way of dealing with someone who doesn't believe in God is to pray for a problem they have that they have shared with you – and let them know you are doing it. Most people don't object even if they have no expectation it will be answered. Actually those sort of prayers usually get interesting answers!

JESUS WALKED WITH THEM ON THEIR JOURNEY

You will notice that these people didn't immediately respond to Jesus. Hardly when His reaction to them was *"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"* The truth maybe but not a very welcome one. They didn't believe on the strength of that, but they let Him walk along with them and allowed Him to continue to talk to them.

You may feel burdened, you may pray for someone, you may show them the love of Jesus, you may explain things – and still they don't show any interest, or they don't get it. It's reckoned that on average, most adults take at least 20 explanations of the Good News before they believe. So, never give up. Keep praying. But most of all, keep with them on their journey of faith as their friend.

George Muller was one of the great sharers of Jesus of the nineteenth century. He was a great man of prayer. Near the end of his life he was asked if anyone he prayed for had not become a Christian. He thought for a moment and named two people he had prayed for but had not trusted Jesus. He died shortly afterwards. Failure? Actually, no. They both became Christians within 6 months of his death. Pray and never give up on people.

“THEIR EYES WERE OPENED” This is a significant phrase. In verse 16 we read that they were kept from recognising Jesus. Later as Jesus broke bread their eyes were opened and they realised who they had been talking to. **CONVERSION IS A WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** People becoming Christians is a work of God. It is the Holy Spirit who turns the lights on. The discussion on the road caused their hearts to burn with in them. They were challenged by the words of Jesus, but the real change came when it all dropped into place – they were changed people. Rather than the slow drag to Emmaus, they returned immediately to Jerusalem to tell people the news. Good News is exciting, people do exceptional things when they understand it.

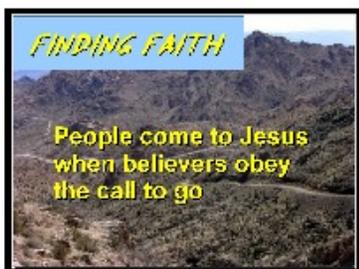
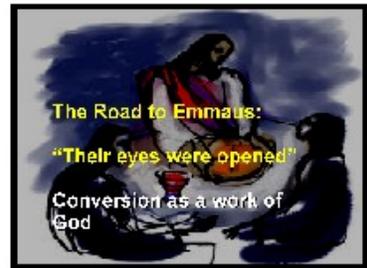
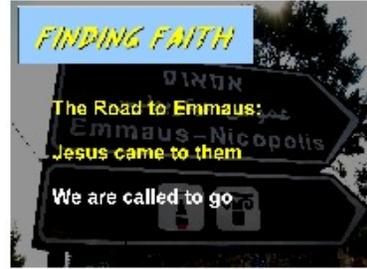
There are two ways that we can react to conversion being the work of God. One is to say that if that's the case He doesn't need me. Some people say that. Or then there's the scriptural view – God calls us to do His work. We do it as His people because He calls us to do it (we did that last week). We are His co-workers. We speak, He acts. That's God's way. As individuals and as a church we are called to it. It's part of who God had called us to be, not an optional extra. And if we don't do it, our church doesn't grow and we don't grow as His people.

PEOPLE COME TO JESUS WHEN BELIEVERS OBEY THE CALL TO GO It's a simple relational thing. When the church of God takes reaching others seriously, people come to Christ. That's how it is. That's how it has always been.

I know many of you pray regularly for revival. Revival in our nation, revival in our town. What does the word revive mean? “Revive” in the British use of the word always is in the context of “Revive your Church O God”. Revive it from its stupor, revive it from its slumber, revive it from its misconceptions, revive it from its disobedience. Revival doesn't start with asking God to save the lost, it starts when we realise that it's us that needs the change.

We know what the grace of God is about. We've received Christ. We know forgiveness. We have glimpsed His glory. We need to ask God to move us. Here's a video of a song by Matt Remand to meditate on – it's a prayer rather than anything else and it says this “send revival: start with me!”

*Preached by Mark Reid
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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 recognizing 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 only a visitor to Jerusalem and do 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 him they did not see." 25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ 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 acted as if he were going farther. 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 recognized 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 recognized by them when he broke the bread. 36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."