

## **The Road to Emmaus.**

So, how *do* you find God?

The Gospel story today (Luke 24;13...) is a funny little story. A couple, Cleopas and probably his wife, followers of Jesus, are walking home, dejected and confused. Dejected because their brilliant, wonderful, funny, compassionate, spirit-filled leader has just been snatched by a government death-squad and publicly executed. Add to dejected "terrified", in case all the followers would be next. Confused because the body was missing and there were strange stories that angels said he was alive. But that clearly made no sense. They bump into a stranger who then explains to them, in the hour or so of walking, all about how the true Messiah would, of course, have to go through this sort of stuff. It was all beginning to make sense, at least theoretically. When they invite this stranger into their home for supper and a bed for the night, he sits at the head of the table, which was odd, and then blesses the food, which was really Cleopas's job, and breaks the bread to share it with them. Then, right then, BINGO, it all fits and IT'S JESUS!!!! And he's gone. An empty chair. A plate with bread divided up into three, and an excitement in their hearts and minds which is like nothing they can remember. So it doesn't make sense...but they have to tell everyone else, and off they go, in the dark, to town to share the news.

This is a story about you, and about me, and anyone who comes to a church. And it's a story about finding God.

Firstly it's about us.

In the Bible times you can easily get the impression that everyone had a closer access to God. It's as if the internet connection to [www.heaven.org](http://www.heaven.org) was closer, broader band or something, and we're stuck on dial-up.

No. This couple were people like us. They were in the same soup of life as us.

Concerning God, they had the feeling that they had rather got it wrong. The idea they had was of God as all-mighty, who would make this Jesus King of Israel, who would bring in the Kingdom of Heaven on armies of angles, or, at least, would keep a good guy like Jesus from being brutally murdered. It just wasn't fair! How could God let that have happened? If God was good, and all powerful, why had this happened? Life seemed to have slipped back into random chaos. Was God actually trustworthy, or should you, maybe, watch out for your self?

Is this unfamiliar? When the butchery of Hitler's war swept through Europe, when the Jews were being exterminated, didn't that question arise? When a child is hit by a car and crippled for life, doesn't it seem de-stabilisingly unfair? When the jobs move to Mexico and you are unemployed at 45, when cancer hits, when your partner says they don't love you anymore..... "God, where are you? What are you doing? Don't you care? This makes no sense God.."

When that is where you find yourself you are with this couple, walking the long, dull road, just trying to get to somewhere known, safe and private. Does this not ring a bell?

So how do you find God here?

This story says that, first off, God has already found you. That is a good piece of theology and worth remembering. God has already found you. You think that God has become a needle in the haystack of your world and it will take Herculean effort to find her. But actually God has made all the effort, without judging if you are worth it, or even if you deserve it. God is right there no

matter how scattered, faithless or angry you might be. Jesus, says this story, is walking with you, already talking to you.

That is what is going on in the stranger they bump into. God is hiding in plain sight.

This may be a guy thing. It's about cars. The time comes to change car. You do all your research and conclude that indeed you do need a Mercedes. Lo, and behold! Suddenly everywhere you go you see people driving the very vehicle you have decided upon! How can this be? And it works as well with a Ford Focus, a Honda Civic or a 1980's pick-up truck. They were there all the time, you just never noticed. You only see when you know how to look. God, like a car make, is hiding in plain sight. Do you know how to see?

"How slow of heart you are." said Jesus to them. Not slow witted, slow minded or plain daft. Just slow of heart. Finding God is a matter of the heart. You will not think your way to God.

Which is odd in that Jesus then proceeds to deliver a lecture on Old Testament Christology. I have sat through some of this, and, though gripping stuff it is, it feels like it is about the head.

I think this is God telling us that theology and study is very important. You should read your Bible, the commentaries by scholars and so forth. You should become as educated about your faith as you can. Jesus, I don't think, rose from the dead to waste his time. This matters. But it is not what matters most.

At the end of the lecture, although they later realised their hearts were on fire, they still felt dejected, afraid and confused. Jesus was still lost to them.

I cannot count the number of folks who have told me of the way God feels so distant, so hard to get to. I have know people who have almost lost their feel for God studying theology. I have known people for whom God has seemed to retreat away from them when once God felt close and sure and safe. People who feel their prayers are addressed to an empty room.

So how do you find this God who is already beside you, giving you all that you need and just waiting for you?

The story of this couple offers us a deflatingly unspectacular answer.

"Go home, make supper, be kind, feed someone."

It is not about climbing Mount Carmel, walking on pilgrimage to Rome on your knees or getting up at 5am to pray each day. Heroic deeds are not the path, muscular spirituality is not needed. It is not a competition, this being with God. There is a profound ordinariness here at the climax of this tale. A little bit of hospitality with a stranger you have already come to feel OK with, a bowl of soup, a loaf of bread and the warmth of your house. Just kindness of an ordinary kind.

Suddenly Jesus, the looked for, lost and longed for light in their darkness, is there with them.

It still made no sense. It was not their heads or minds or brains that burned, but their hearts.

Something had softened, opened, flowered in their hearts. And it was an offer of food and shelter to a travelling companion that was how they found God.

Maybe, this story suggests, it is not so much what you think or understand, nor what the world has done to you, nor your religious beliefs or practices that will bring you to find God. It is, perhaps, what you do.

It is the small acts of love and kindness, the unspectacular gestures of a heart which is still open to love.

To place a twonie in the hand of a beggar, make eye contact and wish a blessing. To take hot-chocolate to the kids' soccer match, and offer some to the family beside you. To cook a favourite meal for someone who you care for. To make a decision to find out about the charity you support, and make a link with the people you are supporting. To wash an altar linen in love for God. It is to quicken, make warm and open, your heart, with compassion. The road to Emmaus is our story. It is told for us, for us who are so like the couple. It is a good story. God is polite, patient and awaits your heart. God is to be found, and it is close by you, in the ordinary, that you'll find him.