

The Walk to Emmaus

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles[a] from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.[b] Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,[c] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.[d] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah[e] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us[f] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

One of the greatest living violinists today has got to be Joshua Bell. When the idea of a child prodigy was still something strange and new, Joshua Bell was one of the only musicians to actually turn it into a fully-fledged career through sheer, continued hard work and excellence. Grammy award winning too. He is now the Music Director for the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

In an experiment initiated by The Washington Post, Bell donned a baseball cap and played as an everyday busker at the Metro subway station in Washington, D.C. for 45mins on January 12, 2007 he played. The experiment was videotaped on hidden camera. Of the 1,097 people who passed by, seven stopped to listen to him, and one recognized him. For his nearly 45-minute performance, Bell collected \$32.17 from 27 passersby, and \$20 from the one person who recognised him.

For the vast majority of people Joshua Bell was invisible. Only one recognised who he was. He played Bach and no one saw who he was.

What is even more interesting, and you can see it for yourself if you search youtube for the film footage of this, there is a line of people nearby, queuing to purchase lottery tickets from a kiosk. They had their backs to him for most of his performance.

One of the puzzling things about the resurrection appearances is why Jesus' closest followers do not initially recognise him. I mean, they spent the most dramatic few years of their lives with him, they regularly ate together, prayed together, and ministered together, yet on the day of the resurrection and the following week there were moments when his friends, those that shared life with him, did not recognise him. Why was that?

There has been a whole host of reasons given by scholars over the years for this, such as environmental reasons like the low light of Easter morning preventing the women from seeing him, or how the disciples on the beach were possibly too far away to be sure who was talking to them at first, and even Jesus intentionally preventing his identity being known. On some level I can accept these, but I'm still left with pondering on whether there is a deeper lesson here.

The only thing that Joshua Bell did was to put a baseball cap on – and no one took any notice of his music. He was displaying truth and beauty in his performance and people walked by. No one saw him, and yet he was right there.

One of the last bits of teaching Jesus did before his death was to tell the parable of the King who considered carefully who would inherit his kingdom. In the parable the King sorted the sheep from the goats, accusing those on his left as ignoring the needs of others.

In Matthew 25:43-44 it says "For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn't give me a drink. I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn't give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me."

"They replied 'Lord, when did we ever see you...hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?' "And the king will answer, 'I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.'

In other words Jesus was saying to his listeners, if this is you, when you saw those in need you failed to see me. We are all convicted here, we all have the same charge upon our name. But there is hope and love from this journey to Emmaus.

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognise Jesus until he broke bread with them. You know, I am convinced that Jesus most likely made a point of hiding his appearance so that the disciples would truly think through the things Jesus was saying to them on the way, rather than accepting the teaching blindly, as they likely would have if they had known it was Jesus.

But I also believe it was a hark back to the last significant teaching about the Kingdom to always recognise the humanity in the 'other', to see the image of God in our brother and sister.

Meals have the power to include and welcome and the power to exclude and shun in equal measure. They have the power to bring great joy and acceptance, as well bring sorrow and alienation. What kind of meal do you experience? Do you feel seen? Jesus sees you.

Can you recall how much trouble Jesus got in for eating with sinners, tax collectors and outcasts. Can you recall the time when his disciples couldn't believe that everyone could be fed, when 5000 families gathered hungry for food? The gospel that Jesus teaches is a gospel of radical hospitality. And this encounter with the resurrected Christ is part this teaching. Through his action of breaking bread with strangers and friends, highlighting the basic human need to eat, he is saying 'do you recognise me now?' And will you recognise me again? And as they do, he leaves.

The disciples' eyes are opened. Not just to the evidence of Christ's resurrection, although that in itself is truly lifechanging, but opened to a world beyond their own. Their eyes were opened to the 'other', that Jesus is the 'other'.

I can imagine how from that moment on these two disciples would've been looking for Jesus in everyone they met.

This passage of scripture has for a long time held a very important place in my own sense of calling and vocation. It is the passage that after reading I heard a friend say to me 'God is calling you', and I truly listened for the first time, for a long time, I listened to my friend, an very elderly lady from the church I attended at the time, say to me 'God' has a task for you.

I could say that as I listened to her, I saw her, and I could see how faithful she was to Christ. But as time has gone by, I have also found a place in my heart to accept that this beautiful woman of faith might have seen Christ in me too.

The task to love others is one thing, a task that we cannot do alone, but the acceptance that I am loved, and that Christ is in you, is a task far greater.

The story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is a reminder to us all that Jesus is with us still, and that he may just be waiting to break bread with you and me.

Just a final thought – about Joshua Bell. If you ever get a chance to watch Joshua Bell play Ave Maria on youtube please do. It was one of the early things to be uploaded to Youtube back in 2007, the same year he did the metro thing. Enjoy the rendition and then take a look at the first three comments under the video.

The first says, A friend asked me "why is there no singing" my dear, the violin is singing, I said."

The second comment is from a young girl called Nami. She says.

I'm going to start playing violin because of this man. Seriously, I've ordered a violin, and I've talked to the music teacher in school :)

And the last comment.

How could no one stop to listen to this at the metro station?

Amen.

John 20:13

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

John 21:4

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

Luke 24:15

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.

TFresh 6 years ago

A friend asked me "why is there no singing" my dear, the violin is singing.

Isaiah Ephraim 7 years ago

I'm going to start playing violin because of this man. Seriously, I've ordered a violin, and I've talked to the music teacher in school :)

Nami S.3 years ago

How could no one stop to listen to this at the metro station? :o