



In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

From our Gospel reading this morning we heard

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

My question this morning is, what does the Bible mean to you? When you think of the Bible, what does that conjure up for you in your mind? Good thoughts, bad thoughts, a mixture perhaps?

Sometimes people look at the Bible and feel overwhelmed. It is a very big book to try and read in its entirety. There are some who find the Bible all a bit much, there are some good stories in there, but there is a lot of other stuff that seems too complicated or unsettling to be able to understand. For others, usually those with an axe to grind, the Bible is a go-to place for quick and nifty quotes. Something to pull out when feeling threatened. There are others who would do away with the majority of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament and only keep those nice bits with Jesus in. You may find yourself fitting one of those descriptions, or you may have a completely different idea. There is a whole variety of approaches to the Scriptures all of which have their own particular merits.

I am not going to list all the positives and negatives about all the different ways we could read the Bible, but I will point out one fault. If there is one assumption that I think is incorrect about the Scriptures it is that they are something we simply read. I don't think this is true because the Bible is more than a simple book. We don't just read the Scriptures, instead we live them. The Road to Emmaus shows that to us today.

If we think about the Road to Emmaus, it's a lot like a Holy Communion service. We see two people walking, who they are we don't know, but they're definitely not disciples, so for today we'll call them 'friends'. The two friends are confused. They've seen Jesus come and go and heard stories of his return. What is that all about? We come to Church, with all our cares, concerns and worries, like the two friends on the road to Emmaus. We then meet with Jesus who helps to make things clear to us. What we see is a form of confession from the two friends, they are lost and confused and need some direction. Jesus points out their mistake with the words "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!" After this we move into Jesus's performance of the Scriptures. I say performance because Jesus is walking and talking with them, they are not sitting at a table with open bibles 'studying'. This looks awfully like the service of the word with Bible readings and a sermon. Jesus points the two friends towards himself through the Scriptures.

What happens next, is that the three arrive in Emmaus, and Jesus pretends to go on. The two friends call him back, they say "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." This looks awfully like the peace, where we call shake hands and urge each other to stay together. In the early Church people who had not yet been baptised and confirmed left just before the peace. The peace was a greeting for all those who would be staying to receive the Holy Sacrament.

What we see next is the great moment of revelation:

"So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight."

It is only when Christ breaks the bread that the two friends understand what is going on. It is only when the Scriptures are acted out that the two friends understand. Hearing and seeing the performance is one thing, but it is in the joining together in a physical act that the revelation is made possible. This is because there is far more to being human than our brains and thoughts. Reading alone is not enough for us to understand and properly meet with Christ. My rather high church approach to the sacraments comes from my placing a real importance on the physical. It is in engaging our senses, sight, hearing, taste, in engaging our bodies through standing, sitting, kneeling, that we draw our bodies closer to Christ. The resurrection itself was an act of true physicality, our bodies are saved as much as our minds. The road to our own salvation therefore is through our bodies. We see this in the Emmaus story Christ is recognised by the two friends because they experience him breaking bread. The Scriptures are made real, made physical before their eyes.

I am deeply sorry that we cannot meet together as a Church at this time. Church over internet really does not work very well because it cannot engage us in our entirety. Our bodies simply fester in front of the screen. It is anything but an incarnational experience. Internet forms of Church are a soteriological dead end in that respect. I long for the day when we will be able to meet together in person again and worship the Lord without fear.

What I think today that Emmaus shows to us is that whilst we may not meet with Christ on the road, we will meet with him, for a moment at least, perhaps only in the blink of an eye, in the breaking of the bread.

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