

**Chalmers Church – Some of the Sunday service at Home!**

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**The text below can also be heard in audio version at**  
**<https://chalmersmemorialchurch2020.podbean.com/>**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter – The Emmaus Road (26<sup>th</sup> April 2020)**

**Introduction**

Hello and welcome to this short act of worship for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Easter. My name is Robin Allison and I am the minister at Cockenzie and Port Seton: Chalmers Memorial Church.

Before I introduce today's Podcast I want to thank Tom Gordon for his leading of last weeks act of worship in which he explored the encounter between Jesus and one of his disciples, Thomas, who was finding it difficult to believe that Jesus had actually risen from the dead.

It's such a powerful story to read. It follows the resurrection of Jesus and it reminds us that what we are being asked to believe here is no easy or everyday occurrence. Nor should we condemn Thomas for not fully understanding what had happened. After all, Thomas had not been there when Jesus had appeared to the other disciples.

Their words declaring that Jesus was alive must have sounded incredulous and yet Jesus, not lecturing nor criticising him, reaches out and offers assurance. It is in the tenderness of that moment that Thomas believes.

This week, we move to another post resurrection story – this time to the lone walkers on the Emmaus Road as they leave Jerusalem to go home again but who do so with pounding emotions caused by the loss of their Saviour still very much in their hearts.

Before we read their story, however, shall we first of all pray?

Let us pray.

**Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

Loving and ever living God, we come to you in these days following the power and glory of Easter with all the reactions that those who experienced it for the first time must have felt.

For some of us it all makes perfect sense. We can see the shape of the gospel being formed before our very eyes. We have encountered he who is risen from the dead and we rejoice.

There are others, though, who still have questions and queries. We sense the truth of what we are told but we still are journeying along a road of faith. On that road of faith we ponder and speculate. We ask questions and open up possibilities. But somehow, we sense you with us in the journey.

From whatever perspective we come this day draw us to you. Journey with us, just as Jesus journeyed with the walkers along the Emmaus Road.

Help us to look up now and again... to look for Jesus in what we read and in what we hear.

Help us to sense the purpose of our quest and the love of the one who journeys with us.

And, in your own good time, give to us the peace that Jesus brought straight to the hearts of those who walked with him that day – a peace that brought recognition and that affirmed them, even in their questioning.

Grant us your presence we pray as we bring these our prayers in the words that Jesus – the risen saviour – taught us to pray saying:

*Our Father*

*Who art in heaven*

*Hallowed be thy name*

*Thy kingdom come,*

*Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread*

*And forgive us our debts*

*as we forgive our debtors*

*And lead us not into temptation,*

*but deliver us from evil*

*For thine is the kingdom, and the power*

*and the glory, for ever, Amen*

### **Bible Reading – Luke chapter 24 verses 13 to 35**

*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 recognising 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 the only one visiting Jerusalem who does 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 they did not see Jesus.’*

*25 He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah 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 continued on as if he were going further. 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 recognised 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 recognised by them when he broke the bread.*

### **Reflection**

*"I've been to Emmaus. You have too. We all get there eventually."* So begins a sermon written by an American preacher by the name of John McCall (<https://fccucc.org/sermons/walking-the-emmaus-road/>) on the passage we read a moment ago.

*"Emmaus (he continues) is the place you go when your world has collapsed, the tossing and turning of the night has left you exhausted and fragile, your dreams are shattered, and your hope is gone".*

Another American preacher, by the name of Scott Hoezee, writes in similar fashion but perhaps with a more down to earth tone – that Emmaus becomes the place where you can get away from *"Dodge City"* ([https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/easter-3a-2/?type=the\\_lectionary\\_gospel](https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/easter-3a-2/?type=the_lectionary_gospel))... Dodge City - the place famed in the old Westerns for being the place where the roughest, toughest and meanest gunslingers of the day were often found to be hanging out, usually with intent to do no darn good until an even more mean and lean sheriff comes along and rounds them all up in one final battle conducted from behind a wibbly-wobbly bar door and a stage coach from the which the horses have bolted and the driver has fled.

If you've been through a rough time recently then Dodge City probably isn't the place you want to be... and, if in the case of our two eponymous walkers you've just left a city called Jerusalem a little bit more bereft and lost than when you first arrived in it then – in all likelihood – Emmaus is probably the better place to be too.

Now, it's easy to get a bit mushy here and put this amazing story from Luke chapter 24 in a slightly more romanticised form... queue sun ahead and shadowy figures ambling along a dusty road... scuffing their feet on the arid ground beneath them...

The reality, at one purely practical level, however, was that Passover was now over.

The big event was now passed. The ceremonies have been carried out and that means that, for most of those who had made their way to be at this special event, that it was time to get along down the road again – whether to far, far away lands or, as with the lone walkers, a mere 7 miles.

Although Passover was, and is, an event imbued with such significance for the Jewish community the simple reality was that surrounding it was the logistical challenges of so many people occupying such a limited space in the Jerusalem of 2000 years ago followed, almost instantaneously, with that same number of people now heading home.

Whether you've ever spent a period of time going on a pilgrimage to a holy place or even simply spent a long weekend headbanging to loud rock music at Glastonbury, everyone has got to go home sometime... and when large numbers of folk leave anywhere at the same time well – we all know what that can be like...

There are queues... frustrations... tensions that threaten to melt away the new inner equilibrium our sojourning's have brought to us – especially when we suddenly see the

length of the queues at the check in points or the cars snaking their way along narrow winding roads trying to reach the more open spaces of the motorways.

Not, of course, that we can do any of that at the moment...

Did you ever think that you'd actually miss the queues?

And did you ever think you'd long so much for just a bit of noise?

Goodness me – at the moment you don't even need to press for the green man anymore at the Co-op in Port Seton to cross the road... you just wait for a moment for the lone car to pass and then walk on...

Changed days, indeed...

In different days, however, the queues would have been there... and, without the green man, there would be a longer and more hazardous crossing to the local grocer's shop in pursuit of that elusive tin of tomatoes that we are all finding so hard to get these days...

Which brings me back to those opening words that I began with – that one way or another we all find our way to Emmaus... and that we all get there, maybe when the crowds are busy – but also when they are quiet – as part of finding a way to get away from the place that has left us feeling a little bit lower than we would have wanted to have felt.

Our own little personal routes – around the harbour, along a promenade, on a circuit of the peripheral road to walk the dog... our own little escape routes and bolt holes where in these quiet days we can spend a little time taking time out... before, as with those who had been to the Passover, we have to make the journey back home again.

So, before we begin to run ahead of ourselves here, we simply pause to recognise that first and foremost these two walkers – revealed to us at verse 18 of our reading as being a man named Cleopas and another unnamed man – were simply going home.

And, in all likelihood, when they got home they'd just go back to doing what they always did at home in Emmaus – fish... farm... mend... build... sell and trade... whatever it was that they normally did... and when they got back to that routine, we can only surmise, they imagined that they'd get over the disappointment that had travelled all the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus with them.

For many people the plan, after disappointment, is often just to go back to their own Emmaus.

What's the point in hanging around in our proverbial Jerusalem if all it's going to do is to make us feel unsettled... disquieted... troubled...?

Who wants to hang around Dodge City only to spend our time there dodging the dodgy people?

At least at home in Emmaus I know where things are... and in my own home I know where the coffee and tea is kept... and I get to sleep in my own bed...

Which is all good and well...

We all need the stability of Emmaus to ground us back into reality again but that is not quite where those walkers had reached at the time when they met the risen Christ as they walked along the road.

In reality, leaving Jerusalem had not been the answer to how they were feeling as our story – at verse 17 - talks of them walking with faces downcast.

Earlier on, at verse 15, our story speaks of them "*talking and discussing*" about "*everything that had happened*"...

The words used here in the Greek actually seem to run counter to the sadness of their physical demeanour. They may have sloped along the road with their shoulders hung low, but the words seem to imply that this was no slow spoken conversation of two men in the doldrums...

It implies that they were literally debating their way through the events of recent days.

They tossed ideas back and forth... poured over the events bit by bit to see if there was anything about these recent events that they had not quite understood.

Bit by bit they build the circumstances up in their minds... try to complete the incomplete circle... make things neat and rounded...

What had that cross on which Jesus died been about?

And what on earth had happened to Jesus' body?

Nothing about this made sense, at all...

And with the death of their Lord so many of their hopes had withered and died too.

As they talk to the stranger who has now appeared alongside them, they start to ramble... recounting the minutest of details of everything that had happened and everything that had so confused them.

Verse 21, *"We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. And what is more (they continued) it is the third day since all this took place"*

Yes, they pondered, if we can't get the answers that we want then in all likelihood Emmaus is a better place to be than Jerusalem where we are only going to compound our confusion.

And so – like an unwanted memento – they take the events of Jerusalem back home with them again.

In their grief, they do not recognise Jesus.

Even when he is standing their next to them, they still do not see – and it wasn't because they needed some glasses...

Grief can cause us to stop us seeing things that we might otherwise be able to see.

It's always a different story when you are the one in the eye of the storm.

Even here, says the theologian and preacher Frederick Beuchner, Jesus does something amazing... something transformative... something that would, eventually open their eyes... something to bring hope... something that would mean that by the time they reached Emmaus that they would, at last, understand.

Here's what he writes, *"I believe that although the two disciples did not recognise Jesus on the road to Emmaus, that Jesus recognised them, that he saw them as if they were the only two people in the world"*. (<https://www.frederickbuechner.com/blog/2019/4/15/weekly-sermon-illustration-recognizing>)

The only two people in the world... That's how Jesus saw these walkers...

The only two people in the world until, that is, Jesus joins us on our journeys along the silent roads to our own Emmaus... recognising us and opening our eyes and hearts.

### **Closing prayer**

Lord, it has been good today to walk along the road to Emmaus and to recognise that we all – at some point in our lives and faith journey – find ourselves on the same sort of road these walkers travelled along.

In these days we often feel like those walkers, as if we are on a journey. We also feel as if we are on a journey that is not the one that we would want to make. And so, as we journey sometimes it is hard to lift our eyes from the road and questions may enter our minds.

Re-assure us that it is not wrong to feel such things.

Instead, remind us that it is at the very moment of walking the Emmaus Road that Jesus Christ appeared and made known what needed to be known.

Bless and be with those who are living with questions this day.

Bless those who need to know answers.

Bless those who need reassurance.

Bless healing hands that need encouraged to keep going in long and challenging days.

Bless those who need souls soothed and kindly words shared to inspire them along the next step of their journey.

God, who appears in stillness and quietness and who reveals himself when we least expect it, hear our prayers in Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Benediction**

*Go now as witnesses of God's eternal presence.*

*The risen Christ has made himself known,*

*so set your faith and hope on God.*

*May God hear and respond whenever you call.*

*May Christ Jesus make himself known to you in all things,*

*and may the Holy Spirit open your eyes and set your hearts on fire with love, Amen.*