

The road trip to belief

Luke 24:13-35

What kinds of things do your family or friends talk about on a road trip?

There's lots of stuff you can chat about on a road trip. The music you're listening to. The views rolling by. Your balanced and considered comments about the performance of other road users. But amongst other things, I've found that journeys on the road are often great times for deeper conversations.

Now, Cleopas and Mary may not have had a car 2000 years ago. But when they trudged seven miles from the tragedy of seeing Jesus crucified in Jerusalem to lick their wounds in the safety of their home in Emmaus; it would turn out to be the most life changing road trip they ever took.

Cleopas is the only one Luke names. We can't be sure the other one was his wife, but v.29 suggests these two lived in the same home, and John 19:25 names 'Mary, the wife of Clopas' as one of the women who literally stood by Jesus as He died on the cross. This family were followers of Jesus - people who had dared to believe that He would rescue God's people and give them hope and a future.

And when Luke writes in v.13 that 'two of *them* were going to Emmaus,' he means two of those who were gathered with Jesus' other followers in vv.9-11. Two of those in the room when some women burst in excitably with a story about an empty tomb and some angels announcing 'He is not here, He has risen!' Two of those who heard this so called news and 'did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.'

And so Mary and Cleopas are heading home to pick up the pieces of a shattered world view and belief system, and to hide away whilst they work out what to make of the world. On the way home, they are not just discussing the events of what we now call Easter weekend - the Greek words suggest they were debating, arguing even. And it draws the attention of another person walking the road, who draws alongside them.

As readers, we get let into the secret that this man is the risen Jesus (His first post-resurrection appearance in Luke). For some reason (and Matthew and John both talk about this strange twist too), they can't recognise Jesus at first. There's something about the resurrected Jesus that's totally recognisable

once your eyes are open to it, but unrecognisable until then. And this apparent stranger asks Cleopas and Mary what all the fuss is about.

They proceed to tell the stranger about the events of the weekend where Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross. In v.18, they take this to be the only guy in Jerusalem who doesn't know all about 'these things'. The irony is this man knows about it better than anyone; 'these things' happened to Him. But, Jesus plays along, and invites them to tell Him what happened that weekend as if He'd never heard a thing about it.

And in vv.19-24, Cleopas and Mary sum it up. First they tell the stranger things that were evidently true to them, in vv.19-21. Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet - someone who spoke truth to power and poverty in the name of God, whose actions and words were powerful. And the people in charge killed Him for it. So far, so famous. Famous enough that this is still the view of Jesus that people take to be evident to all today.

Then they tell the stranger something a bit more personal, in v.21. The hopes they had in this man Jesus, and how they've been crushed. They really thought this was the person they had been waiting for. To change their lives and save their country. But now... now, He was dead and gone. They would have to rebuild their lives from this ground zero.

People in 21st century Inverness experience this a different way. They grow up with stories about Jesus, encouraged to believe them and put their childish hope in them. Everyone thinks Sunday School and Good News Club are 'good for their kids.' Then, somewhere around the teenage or early adult years, those same kids are encouraged to crush those childhood beliefs and write off hope in Jesus as an irrelevance. And they rebuild their lives around something else.

Cleopas and Mary are honest enough to finish the story in vv.22-24. They explain that there was a story going around, started by some women, that Jesus had been raised to life again. They report the story faithfully enough - the women went to the tomb; they found it empty. They claimed angels announced Jesus was alive. Others went to the tomb; they also found it empty.

Like a good number of people today, they know this bit of the story, and they can tell it fairly accurately - but they do it without any sense of belief or hope in it being *true*. I would suspect that the majority of people in this community will be aware of the claim 'Jesus is alive' is part of the Easter story (but by no

means everyone!) I think fewer would be able to tell you how that claim began and got reported. And fewer still would tell you with any belief in the claim. What about you?

How would you explain the events of Easter weekend to someone who had never heard anything about it before?

The first and most important lesson that this passage has to teach us is the most obvious one - it's telling us that Jesus *is* alive. That the claims are true. At the very start of his book, Luke told us in his first four verses that the point of his book was to report what he had investigated thoroughly from the eye-witnesses of Jesus' life, death and resurrection; that his readers may be confident of the truth of these things.

Here at the end of his book, Luke reports the story of some people on a journey, who are just as sceptical about impossible claims as any modern person priding themselves on rational thinking.

These things weren't spoken and written by people who wanted to make up a new religion. They were passed on to us by astounded people who became thoroughly convinced that Jesus is alive, and did all they could to pass it on to us so that we would believe it too.

Luke reports that Jesus is alive, but also tells the story of how these people on this journey walk the road trip to belief. It's a model of a family's experience of what coming to faith in Jesus (or even coming *back* to faith in Jesus) is like.

This passage starts in v.13 with a family slowly walking away from the community of Jesus' followers; heading home to keep themselves to themselves. But it finishes in vv.33-35 with the same family rushing back to join with the community of Jesus' followers and share stories of each other's experiences. And it's what happens in between these verses, on the road and at the table, that brings the transformation from A to B.

The journey starts with what N.T. Wright describes as 'the slow, sad dismay at the failure of human hopes.' In vv.13-17, we read about Cleopas and Mary slowly wandering home, and stopping still with downcast faces as they describe how all their hopes had been dashed. The road to faith in Jesus so often starts when you hit a point in your life where your hopes are dashed, the thing you were pinning everything on falls apart, and it's like you grind to a halt. It doesn't have to start there; but it so often does.

Then someone bearing the presence of Jesus draws alongside you. For Mary and Cleopas in vv.15-24, it was Christ Himself (though they didn't realise that at first); for people today, it's the Christian friend or family member. They ask if they can walk alongside you; they show interest in your story. You're open enough to sharing it with them; maybe it'll help, maybe not.

Then at some point along the journey, this person bearing the presence of Jesus points you to a Bible. A book that maybe you've read a lot of but never made much of, or maybe has sat on your shelf gathering dust for years. Jesus responds to Cleopas and Mary in vv.25-27 with an impromptu on-the-road Bible study, showing them how what's written there can reshape their understanding of everything.

Then the journey moves on - from on the road to at the table. To a place of deeper sharing and deeper relationship. In vv.28-29 comes a crossroads moment. Jesus is ready to move on if He needs to. But Mary and Cleopas take the opportunity to let Him in to their home. And it's here, at the table, as they break bread together in vv.30-31, that this family encounters the risen Jesus for themselves.

The penny drops, their eyes are opened, they realise they have met the Lord Jesus for themselves and a relationship with this living Lord has begun. More than that, they realise that actually, Jesus has been walking the road with them the whole time! It's just that they hadn't realised He'd been with them. But now this family *does* recognise the living Lord Jesus with them on the road, and with them *in their home* - everything changes forever.

You see the world with new eyes (v.31). There's fire in your hearts (v.32). There's wind in your sails (v.33). In vv.33-35, the family that has encountered the risen Jesus rushes back to the community of Jesus' followers - and there, they share stories of their experiences, and in doing so they bless each other with solid assurances that it's all *true* - Jesus *is* alive!

Starting the journey from the ground zero of dashed hopes. Letting a person bearing the presence of Jesus walk with you. Reading the Bible with them and seeing how God's Word reshapes your understanding of everything. A personal encounter with the risen, living Lord Jesus; as you invite the presence of Jesus into your home. And an eager desire to be with the community of people who are experiencing all this too. This is the road trip to belief.

Can you describe a time when your eyes were opened and your heart started burning with what you were discovering about Jesus?

Hopefully you'll have picked up on some lessons here for those of you who want to know how to get from A to B, and for those of you who want to help others get from A to B. To those who are following Jesus, and whose heart is to bring others to Him too, here's a few observations about how Jesus led people to faith in Him here. He budged in twice, and then waited to be asked in.

1) He budged in first to walk alongside people in their brokenness. Maybe it feels presumptuous to barge in to people's lives when they're in pain. Maybe it sounds manipulative to be peddling Christian faith when they're vulnerable. But that's not what Jesus did. He just asked them what their story was, and walked with them, letting them share as much as they wanted.

2) At some point on the journey with them, He budged in again with the Bible. He showed them how God's Word would reshape their thinking about everything they were experiencing. He didn't say 'read it for yourself,' He looked at it with them, and talked about it with them. Maybe this means meeting for coffee to do this together; maybe it means taking the chance to invite people to an Alpha course when it's on. But the bottom line is, somewhere along the road, you point people to God's Word and invite them to look at it with you.

3) Then at the crossroads moment, Jesus waited to see if He was asked in to talk about all this further. He was ready to move on if He wasn't asked in, but when He was asked in to a place of deeper sharing and friendship and conversation, He took the opportunity.

4) Really practically, there's two great places where deep and meaningful often happen; when they're pretty natural and unforced. On the road together, and even more meaningfully sometimes at each other's kitchen tables. Take those chances to share life and share conversation about Jesus in those places. Once you've heard your friend's story, don't be afraid to bring the Bible into those bike rides, car journeys, lunch dates and cuppas. That's how you make your introductions: 'God, this is my friend. My friend, this is God.'

The on-the-road stuff has happened with us. Part of Kerry coming to faith was the runs she would go out on with her friend Susie. Part of David

Maclean coming to faith was a Christian friend going golfing with him. Talking as they journeyed side by side. And the at-the-table stuff has happened too. More than once, I have seen people encountering the risen Jesus as I've been sat with them in their homes or they've been sat in mine.

To those who are not yet following Jesus, but want to know how you might; can I encourage you to learn from Cleopas and Mary? The bottom line is this - be open to the budging in. When your Christian friend or family member shows a willingness to walk with you when things have fallen apart, let them alongside you. Let them hear your story and share the journey.

Let them encourage you into the Bible. If you don't have one, take one from the box here today. Begin to read it, and see if God does speak to you through it and start to reshape things in your life. Don't do it alone, ask your Christian friend questions about it - go on, test them out, it'll be good for them. Read it together with them. You could start by reading this book we're just finishing off here in church - Luke's gospel.

And when you hit that crossroads moment - invite Jesus in. Don't let another ten years pass building your life around hopes and dreams that get dashed to disappointment before you'll start another road trip like this. When you've heard enough to know that Jesus is good news in your life, and you *want* Him to come in, why not put the ball in His court: 'Jesus, if you're real, will you show me?' Take *this* chance to encounter the living Lord Jesus and be changed forever.

The bit of the journey where your eyes get opened and you meet Jesus for yourself happens when you're open to it, and when God decides to open your eyes. But let's finish by seeing when the penny dropped for Cleopas and Mary. It was when they understood what the Bible was really teaching about Jesus, as He started explaining in v.26. It was when they understood that Jesus had to suffer the death He did, *and then* enter His glory.

Although I've been talking about how Jesus and His followers reach people whose lives are in pieces, the passage isn't about generic dashed hopes. It's about two people who thought God was putting everything right through Jesus, and then saw their faith fall apart.

It fell apart because they saw Jesus mocked and ridiculed without reply, and then they saw Him dead and buried. Silent. Finished. Weak. All the hype unfulfilled. Naturally, they thought it was all an empty lie. They couldn't

possibly think any other way... until they experienced the reality of His resurrection power.

That started when the stranger on the road opened the Bible up to them and pointed out, 'but this is how God said it was going to work... you just didn't see it, did you?' First suffering, then glory. First experiences of rejection, suffering, darkness and apparent defeat - *then* entry into new life, victory, and something infinitely better.

Something like this has to dawn on you if you're going to open your eyes to the real, living Jesus walking alongside you and changing your life forever. You have to get that this Jesus is your God - but He is God who had to go through the silence and apparent defeat to the world's worst influences, and to death itself; *before* rising to break the power of all these things.

You have to get that the Bible doesn't describe a God who rescues people *from* suffering so much as He rescues people *through* suffering. That's how God's own Son set about His own life and mission and rescued us. That's how He's at work in our lives too. If you're waiting for God to make everything perfect before you'll believe in resurrection power, you haven't yet learned that the cross comes first - for Jesus, and also for you.

But when you come to know that Jesus *is* alive; when you and your family turn around and run back into the community of people who are discovering and sharing that truth - then you'll begin a road trip the likes of which you've never been on before.