

Beyond Easter, Pt.2

Lk.24.13-35

2021-04-25 Sermon by Major Brian Coles

[slide 1, blank] “The landscape of politics is changing,” explained the political pundit on the television news show. “We may as well face it. It’s the impact of the electronic media.”

This pundit went on to talk about how two generations ago, a leadership candidate could write one speech addressing the big issues facing the nation and use that one speech everywhere he went. But not today.

Why? Because people don’t care about anything in the general sense anymore. They want to know about *their* factory, *their* jobs, *their* health care benefits, *their* neighbourhood schools, *their* sense of values.

The candidate who hopes to win cannot run around speaking vaguely about some generic vision for the country.

“To get the vote,” the pundit said, “you have to get down to the local issues.” It’s a point well taken - the importance of getting down to the local issues. Perhaps this is a point the church needs to take seriously as well.

We say we believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, but what does that have to do with the local issues?

We say we believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, but how does this connect to the woman in the congregation whose has cancer, to the 17-year-old teen anxiously trying to decide what to do with his life, to the young legal assistant who is seeing unethical practices at her firm, to the man who, at age 55, just lost his job, or to the plant manager who had to make the decision to lay him off?

We say we believe that on the third day Jesus rose bodily from the dead, but how does this connect to the man and woman who, every Sunday afternoon, place fresh flowers on the grave of their granddaughter? What does the X’n faith have to do with the local issues?

For many people, the X'n faith seems to float above the nitty-gritty of everyday life. The X'n faith seems disconnected from the local issues we face on a day-to-day basis.

Such people are not opposed to the idea that God is gracious and loving, merciful and kind, and they do not hesitate to say, "on the third day he rose bodily from the dead." But these are distant truths.

For them, the problem is not that the X'n faith is remarkable; the problem is that the X'n faith is not relevant. The gospel seems to them to be vaguely true, but it has no bearing on every-day living.

They may affirm the X'n faith to be true in the same way they affirm that the sun is 150,000,000 kms from the earth. It's true and trustworthy information, to be sure, but not much help in planning the day.

So, what difference does Easter make in the ins and outs of everyday life. What difference does it make in the way we work, play, spend our money, make decisions large and small.

What difference does it make that on a Sunday morning almost two millennia ago Jesus was raised bodily from the dead by the power of God? In other words, what does the Easter faith have to do with the local issues?

[slide 2] That's where Luke's story of two followers of Jesus trudging their weary way down the Emmaus road comes into play.

When all is said and done, this is a story about how the truth of Easter belongs not only as a headline on the front page of the newspaper, but also as a neighbourhood news item listed on the back page.

This is a story of how the amazing truth of Christ's bodily resurrection comes home as a local issue. Let's look at the story written by Luke, as if it were a movie.

[slide 3] As the movie begins, two followers of Jesus are walking down a country road from the city of Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus.

As the camera pans across the roadside scene, we note that this day is Easter Sunday, the day God shattered the chains of sin and broke the icy grip of death by raising Jesus bodily from the tomb.

[slide 4] But as the camera moves in for a close-up on our two weary travelers, we realize that for these disheartened disciples of Jesus, it's not Easter yet; it's only Sunday afternoon.

It may be the day of resurrection, a mind-blowing, world-changing truth to be sure, but Easter has not yet become a local issue for these disciples.

As the camera slowly pans back from the despairing faces of these two discouraged disciples, [slide 5] a stranger catches up to them on the road.

He is, of course, the resurrected Jesus, but, as Luke informs us, in the dimness of their discouragement they are prevented from recognizing him.

If we fast forward to the end of the movie, however, by the time they reach Emmaus, their hearts are burning with faith [slide 6] and they are joyfully rushing back to Jerusalem. You can picture them singing the Easter hymn, "Christ the Lord is risen today!"

For these disciples, Easter has moved from being a great cosmic event right down to a local issue.

[slide 7, blank] But why? What happened? How did the great sweeping truth of Easter become a local issue on this back road to Emmaus?

The crucial clue is found at the end of the movie. Line 35 in your script: [slide 8] "Then the two told what had happened *on the way*," Luke writes, "and how Jesus was recognized by them when he *broke the bread*."

Easter became a local issue through two events in this verse. [slide 9] The first event was while walking "along the road" or "on the way."

The first readers of Luke would have smiled at this reminder that Easter became a local issue “along the road” or “on the way.”

You see “road” or “way” was a symbol for them of the X’n life, the path of following Jesus.

In fact, the first X’ns were called, by friends and enemies alike, “the Way” or “followers of the Way.”

Luke makes this reference several times in Ac. 9.2; 19.9, 23; 24.14, 22.
[slide 10] For us, the glorious truth of Easter becomes a local issue on the way.

In the literal sense, the resurrected Jesus became a local issue for these two disciples on the way to Emmaus.

For us, the bodily resurrection of Jesus becomes a local issue as we travel the “way,” of the X’n life, the way of following Jesus in loving obedience.

Jesus is with us as we travel along the way of the X’n life. But what does travel along that way look like?

It looks like welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick, comforting the distressed, teaching biblical faith to our children, speaking the good news, the gospel, to those who do not know it, whispering words of encouragement to those who doubt, providing food for the hungry, and hundreds of other everyday acts of loving obedience that make up the X’n life.

It is along this way that the resurrected Jesus meets us and is present with us.

[slide 11, blank] In his book, *The Spiritual Life Of Children*, Robert Coles (no relation to me) writes about Ginny, a young girl from a poor family who is bright, articulate, imaginative, and has a very mature faith for her age.

Ginny is walking home from school. Along the way she encounters an elderly woman who seems lost and confused.

Ginny asks the woman if she needs help, and the woman, with relief, responds, "If you could, that would be wonderful."

Ginny discovers that the woman has been walking to visit her daughter but has gotten disoriented. She shows Ginny the written directions she has, and Ginny knows immediately where she needs to go.

Although Ginny is now late for her home chores, she senses that getting this troubled stranger safely to her destination is the chore she most needs to be doing.

So, she travels with her, talking to her, listening to her, and guiding her to her daughter's house.

When they arrive and Ginny starts to leave, the woman grasps her arm and says to her, "Ginny, God has sent you to me and I want to pray a prayer of thanks to him for having sent you to help me." The woman prayed and then gave Ginny a kiss on the top of her head.

On the way home, Ginny wonders what it will be like to be old. She wonders if she were old and in need if God would send some kid like her to help.

"Maybe God puts you here," Ginny thought, "and gives you these hints of what's ahead, and you should pay attention to them, because that's Him speaking to you."

There "on the way," a little girl helped a stranger in need, performing the task she knew most needed to be done, and the presence of the resurrected Lord became a local issue.

But it's not just "on the way" that Easter becomes a local issue. [slide 12] Look again at v.35. "Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread."

The first readers of Luke would have smiled at that too. This was there way of speaking of worship.

They would have remembered the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper when he took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples.

They would have remembered these same actions being repeated by Jesus at the meal table in Emmaus, when he took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them.

They would have been reminded that Jesus is present in their act of worship. [slide 13] **For us, the glorious truth of Easter becomes a local issue in worship.**

As we gather into God's presence, he is with us, though unseen. He is present and reveals himself to us through all the acts of our worship; through our singing and praying, through our hearing and responding to his Word.

[slide 14, blank] It was in worship that Easter became a local issue for Tom and his friend.

One chilly Saturday morning Tom paid a visit to his old friend. His friend lay in an upstairs bedroom, cared for by folk from the hospice, who brought him in and then left them alone.

"There wasn't much to say," said Tom. "My friend could not move from his bed without help.

As his prospects dimmed, the steady stream of cheerful cards and flowers had slowed, and his coming death, only a few weeks away, was already an intruder in the room.

Despite the numbing effects of the medication, he was in constant pain now, his skin an oily grey, his face so taut that he seemed always near some expression between a scream and a smile, and his eyes were constantly wide, doll-like - the liquid, unfocused eyes of a dying man who sees nothing and yet sees everything.

We sat mostly silent, a word passing between us only now and then, not an awkward silence, but more the stillness of old friends, content to sit and say farewell with quietness.

Suddenly there was movement downstairs; the sounds of muffled voices and shuffling of feet.

It was several members from the church who had come to sing. Their voices started, sweet and pure, "Near the cross I'll watch and wait..."

My friend and I looked at each other and waited as the church members slowly made their way up the stairs to the room, their voices growing nearer and stronger, "...Hoping, trusting ever..."

The church members were now standing in the doorway. My friend, deep into the darkness of dying, turned away so they would not see his tears as they sang, "Till I reach the golden strand just beyond the river."

There in the face of death, an act of worship took place, and the promise of resurrection came home.

On the way and in worship the glorious truth of Easter, of the bodily resurrection of Jesus, intersects with all of life, and becomes a very local issue for all of us.

Jesus is with us on the way, through all we face and in all we do in life. And Jesus is with us now, in worship, ready to minister his grace to us. He is drawing near to you, to encourage and comfort you, to heal and strengthen you.

As we spend these next few moments in prayer, let us be aware of his presence, be listening to his voice, and be ready to respond to his leading, as we sing, Jesus himself drew near.