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West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Text: Luke 24:13-35

(Sole nominee)

Oscar Pistorius. Please put your hand up if you have never heard that name before. *So everybody here has heard about Oscar Pistorius.*

Please put your hand up if you didn't know that he is on trial for shooting his girlfriend. *No hands.*

And that trial is taking place thousands of miles away from here, across the ocean, and it doesn't have any real connection to our lives here in Scotland.

I know it probably has something to do with the fact that I am South African, like Oscar Pistorius, but every second person asks my opinion about Oscar's story. Is he guilty? What happened on that fateful night? Will we ever really know?

I think that we can assume with some degree of certainty that practically everybody around here, miles away from South Africa, knows who Oscar is and that his once promising future as an Olympic athlete is on the line now.

And just like we would find it *very* strange for anybody *not* to know about this, because it's been all over the news for quite some time now; on their journey home from Jerusalem, Cleopas and his friend found it *very* strange that the person who joined them along the way had *no idea* why they were upset.

They were all travelling from Jerusalem, going home after a festival where a very well known and important person was publicly executed. The stranger who joined them was *there*, in Jerusalem, how on earth could he not know?!

People just *know* about things like that. News about celebrities standing on trial or being executed spread like wildfire. *Everybody* knew that Jesus died on the cross!

The 2 travel companions were upset for a reason. For the first time in what must have felt like *ages*, the Jews had hope for their future again. There was a redeemer on the horizon, someone called Jesus, somebody they looked up to, somebody they believed could free them from Roman oppression!

But now their hopes were shattered. Because Jesus was dead. And with him died their dreams of freedom and a bright new future.

They were back at square one. Disappointed. Sad. Worried about what would happen to them now.

And with this heavy weight on their shoulders, they started their long journey home after all the Passover festivities in Jerusalem.

On their way home the 2 friends were joined by this stranger, who seemed to be ignorant of what has just happened.

Now, we might find it odd that a complete stranger joined them and walked with them all the way to their home, but that was a common occurrence in those days. People sometimes travelled for days on end, on foot, and welcomed company. There were lots of Jews going home after celebrating their most important religious festival of the year, and it was only natural to start a conversation with others travelling in the same direction.

It is significant that there were *2 people* travelling together when the stranger joined them, because for any testimony to be accepted as true in Biblical times, 2 witnesses were needed.

These 2 friends were so wrapped up in themselves because of what just happened; they were so shocked and sad about Jesus' death, that they didn't even *realise* that in actual fact it was Jesus who joined them.

The thing that bothered them most was the fact that it's now been 3 days since Jesus was crucified. Deep in their hearts they hoped for a miracle, for news that it was just a dream, that Jesus didn't really die – but it was all a reality now, because in those days if somebody died,

such a person was declared officially dead after 3 days. So – if any kind of miracle was going to take place, it would have happened by now...

And the fact that a group of women told them that Jesus' grave was empty, upset them even more. The testimony of a woman wasn't worth anything in Biblical times, but *even* if it was true, it never occurred to them that Jesus might have been resurrected.

At this point in their discussion, Jesus decided to enlighten them. He started explaining the Scriptures to them, where it was prophesied that a Messiah would come, and had to suffer and die before Israel could be free again, but not free from Roman oppression, free from the reign of sin.

Like every other Jew of the time, they knew these things very well – they just never thought to apply it to Jesus. It's been *there*, all this time, the explanation of what was to happen to Jesus, right in front of their eyes, but they didn't see it. Just like they saw Jesus walking with them, but at the same time *didn't* see Jesus.

When they reached their destination, they insisted that Jesus stay over with them. Now once again this is surely not something we would do today – inviting a complete stranger over to dinner and to stay for the night, but in the 1st century the rules of hospitality demanded that not even a stranger should be allowed to travel at night. Jesus refused politely, but only because that would give the 2

friends the opportunity to convince him to stay over, as was the custom.

Inside the house Jesus took over the role of the host by breaking the bread. And at *this* their eyes were opened and they realised who he was. Jesus, in that familiar action of breaking bread, made it dawn upon them what's been going on.

Immediately they understood why he was able to explain the Scriptures to them in the way he did and why they felt so drawn to him.

This realisation made them jump up, abandon their meal, and travel back to Jerusalem at once. They felt so privileged to have met the risen Jesus, and they couldn't wait to share this wonderful news with the rest of their people.

It didn't bother them at all that they *just* walked 7 miles, in scorching heat with only sandals on their feet. I get the impression that they quite literally left everything lying and almost ran back to Jerusalem.

We read that their hearts were *burning*. How amazing. I guess if your heart is burning you don't even notice that your feet are aching! But this good news they just had to go share immediately!

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Have you ever been on a journey like that? A journey that took you full circle? A journey that made you turn around in your footsteps, where your starting point ended up being your destination? A journey that changed you so completely, that you would just never be the same again?

God sometimes sends us on journeys that take us places we never expected to be. The important thing for us to remember is that we are never on these journeys alone – Jesus is walking with us. And if we don't see him, it's because we are focusing too much on our own problems and worries.

No matter where we are in life – if we *look up*, and *open our eyes*, we *will* see Jesus walking alongside us.

Every single one of us is on a journey.

I'm 40 years old. And what a journey it's been so far! It started far from here, in sunny South Africa, and just look at the amazing place it's brought me to! I've had many different companions on this journey, sometimes huge crowds, sometimes only 1 or 2 people, I've heard and seen and experienced many things along the way – some hard and difficult, some exciting and fun!

I've had times during which I felt burdened or worried or frustrated or sad, like when I lost my mum, when I had to run away from armed

robbers with a baby in my arms, when my other baby was fighting for his life in hospital when he was only 4 weeks old...

But I've also had times during which I felt happy, overjoyed, uplifted; like when I said 'yes' to spend the rest of my life with André – never a dull moment there(!!), twice, when my boys were born, the day I set foot on Edinburgh Airport and knew that I was home...

But the one constant, the one thing that never changed through all the many twists and turns my journey took, was the presence of Jesus, walking beside me.

It is his presence that makes it possible for us to put one foot in front of the other when our heavy hearts make our feet feel heavy too, but it's also his presence that warms our hearts and gives us a spring in our step.

Jesus has always been a part of *my* journey. Sometimes it's been obvious, easy to feel his presence; sometimes it's been hard to even catch a glimpse of him. But looking back, I know he's definitely always been there. And looking forward, I know He'll never leave my side.

Jesus is walking beside *you too* - whether you realise it, or not. Jesus walks beside us, beside all of us, before we even know it. Just like he was walking beside Cleopas and his companion, all the way from Jerusalem. Something needed to *happen* for them to realise it, Jesus

had to break the bread. Jesus' body has been broken for all of us – what more do we need?!

The knowledge of what Jesus has done for us, and his constant presence in our lives through the Spirit, should make us want to *shout it out* to the world, should make us want to turn around on our heels and walk back the whole 7 miles to where we came from, because good news like that, the news that Jesus is alive, forevermore, for all of us, is not something we can keep quit about.

If your heart is *burning* for Christ, not even the worst thing imaginable here on earth will be able to make you loose sight of the presence of God in your life completely.

So wherever you are on *your* journey this morning, remember, Jesus is walking with you, and he's *not* leaving your side, ever. So acknowledge him, lean on him, trust him, thank him.

Because he is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

Amen