

**Sermon**  
**18 April 2021**  
**West Kirk of Calder/Polbeth Harwood**

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Reading: Luke 24:13-35

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We all know this story of the journey to Emmaus very well.

*Two men were walking home from Jerusalem on the Sunday after Jesus was crucified. They lived in Emmaus, about 7 miles northwest of Jerusalem. They were followers of Jesus, and devastated at the fact that he was crucified. A stranger joined them, and they just couldn't believe it that he didn't seem to know what happened in Jerusalem that weekend...*

Reading this story so many years after it happened, and knowing exactly how it ends, might cause us to maybe not realise how very significant this event was – how a very ordinary journey, changed into something extraordinary.

So just for a minute – let's think of our own lives, and see if this can make this story more real for us today...

*The 2 men were walking.*

Walking is something most of us have been doing frequently since the start of lockdown. To get exercise, to get fresh air, to prevent ourselves

from going stir crazy! And also, when we were allowed to, to meet with people. And as we did that, we would usually fall into deep conversation, mainly about some or other aspect of the global pandemic.

*The 2 men were joined by a stranger.*

On our daily walks, we often bump into people – friends and strangers alike. Sometimes we just smile and carry on walking, but sometimes we exchange a few words – mostly, again, about the situation we've been dumped into by Covid19.

*The 2 men were shocked that the stranger didn't know why they were upset.*

Everybody knew what happened to Jesus that weekend. Not knowing about that, would be like meeting someone who's never heard of Covid19 today. I mean, that's just not possible – EVERYBODY knows about Covid!

*The 2 men didn't recognise Jesus.*

We can assume Jesus might have looked different – after all, he was resurrected from the dead. But hasn't that happened to you before? That someone stops to chat with you, and they seem to know you very well, but you just cannot place them?

*It was only when Jesus broke the bread that they knew who he was.*

But then, when that person says something or does something familiar, it dawns on you who they are! (This happens to me all the time – if I meet people on a walk, in my joggies with my hair pulled up in a ponytail, they don't recognise me until I say something about the church!

*Then* they realise who I am, and say: “So sorry Nanda, I didn’t recognise you without your collar on!”)

*The 2 men were upset, distressed, puzzled.*

Our current situation also makes us feel like that – full of questions as to why all this is happening...

Jesus didn’t console the men by saying: “Don’t worry guys, it’s me, everything is going to be okay!” No – he laid out the Scriptures to them – he reminded them that all through history God has never left their sides – and in this way he led them to conclude *themselves* that although they can’t always understand life, they can know for a fact that they will never have to face anything alone.

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So – it was when these 2 men were doing something very ordinary – walking home after spending the Passover in Jerusalem – just putting one foot in front of the other on their journey through life – that they met the risen Jesus.

What I would like to focus on today, is their *reaction* when they eventually realised who the ‘stranger’ was.

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?”

And then: **They got up and returned *at once* to Jerusalem.**

They made a U-turn.

They literally got up and ran all the way back to where they just came from, to tell the others what happened. They just couldn't keep this amazing news to themselves!

7 miles, after a long, emotionally draining and physically exhausting weekend, at night-time, with only a thin pair of sandals between their feet and the dirt road. Not an easy journey – but they simply had to go back straight away.

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Have you ever had to make a U-turn? Like when you've missed the turn-off, or when you realise you forgot something important at home...

We don't like turning back. We usually see it as a waste of time, and time is precious.

And especially if it someone else's fault that we need to make a U-turn, we can get quite angry about it – like when you are halfway there on your way to a concert, and your partner/friend tells you he/she forgot the tickets at home!

We don't like making U-turns.

But sometimes, sometimes it is crucially important to make a U-turn.

Why?

Because what is the point of driving all the way to a concert, but once you get there you can't get in, because you don't have the tickets with you...

What is the *point* of life if you just keep rushing forward? We are not on this journey for the sake of the *journey* – our lives have to be meaningful. And in order to achieve that, we sometimes have to turn around – whether we like it or not.

Why did those two men go straight back where they came from? Not because they forgot something, but because they met Jesus. Meeting Jesus should make you change the direction of your life.

Those 2 men made a spiritual U-turn as well. They realised that they couldn't just sit there and finish their dinner – something significant happened to them, and they had to share it.

Jesus walks with *us* through life as well. Every step of the way. And if we truly understand what it means to have him by our sides, we will very often have to make U-turns too.

The 2 men had a *feeling* about this stranger, their hearts were warmed when he spoke to them.

Sometimes we do things or say things, and then we get a *feeling* about it too.

It could be a feeling that we should go back and change what we've just done, or that we should go back and have a proper look at who we've just walked past.

Very often in life our faith will make us realise that we need to make a U-turn.

If you use a satnav in your car, and you take a wrong turn, it will say:  
“Please make a U-turn.”

“When it’s safe, make a U-turn.” And a satnav can be quite annoying, because it won’t stop until you’ve actually made the U-turn. Why? Because it’s *programmed* to keep you on the right road, so you can reach your destination.

And I often think of the Holy Spirit in that way – God’s Spirit is programmed to let us know when we need to change direction, when we need to go back, and it will keep bothering us until we’ve actually done that!

Because Jesus wants us to make a difference in life. To *live* our faith. To care:

- When we walk past someone in our hurry to get to where we need to be, and from the corner of our eye we notice something is wrong, we need to make a U-turn. We need to turn around and see if we can do something to help. Even if that makes us late.
- If we said something hurtful to someone, even if it felt good at the time, we need to make a U-turn and go apologise.
- If someone hurt us and we want to run as far away from them as we possibly can, we need to make a U-turn and go forgive them.

And how will we know to do these things? We will feel it in our hearts.

Meeting Jesus makes you look at life differently. It makes you realise there is a bigger picture, and that you have a role to play in it.

I think the most important lesson to be learned from what happened to the 2 men on their way to Emmaus, is that we *shouldn't* be surprised by the presence of God in our lives.

Just like Jesus walked with those 2 men, he walks with us. All the time.

On our journey through life, Jesus walks alongside us. Let's make sure we go through life with open eyes, so we can see him; with open hearts, so we can recognise him; with open ears, so we can hear him.

Let's not just run through life, but make time to stop, and turn around when we need to – *because no-one who has met the risen Jesus can just carry on with their lives as if nothing has changed...*

Amen