

Zoom service 18.04.21 led by Sue Jones

Sermon

It's intriguing why the two friends on the way to Emmaus didn't recognise Jesus. Although not two of Jesus' closest friends, they were his friends and followers. They had known him a while and had seen his miracles and heard his teaching. They knew what he looked like, what he sounded like. So why didn't they recognise the stranger who joined them on the road for who he was?

Maybe they didn't recognise Jesus because they were concentrating on their journey to Emmaus. It was about 7 miles from Jerusalem with lots of places where they might be attacked by robbers.

The two friends would not be dawdling and would be talking, discussing what had happened and grieving. They had lost a friend just a few days ago. Not only a friend, but their leader, their beloved teacher. And he didn't simply die; he was executed in the most torturous, shameful way. As they walked, they might have talked of pleasanter memories - of all that the teacher said, of the people they knew whom Jesus had healed. There was so much to discuss they probably couldn't stop talking.

And then they were joined by a stranger, which was worrying enough, but this stranger addressed them directly by asking what they were talking about. Very worrying.

This question distracts them out of their grief and one friend asks, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening these last few days?" to which the stranger replies, "What things?" The two friends must have looked at each other incredulously at that question.

Everyone in Jerusalem knew about the crucifixion and the things that had happened during and since. Where had this stranger been the past week if he didn't know about them? It would have been like someone today asking what has been happening in the world recently and not having heard about Covid-19.

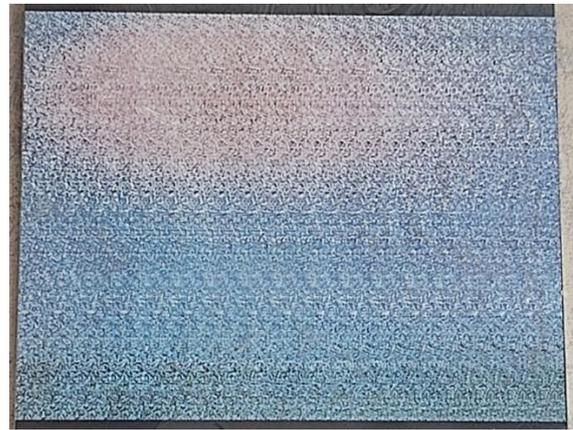
So they tell the stranger about what happened to Jesus, how they had hoped that he would be the one to set Israel free, how he had been arrested and crucified, how some of the women had not found his body when they went to the tomb, had seen visions of angels who said that Jesus was alive but that now this was the third day since then and still nobody had seen him. They may have said this a little impatiently, but what the stranger says in response would not have been what they expected. He called them foolish, foolish for not believing everything the prophets had said, the very things that Jesus had said in the days leading up to his arrest. It's one thing to be called foolish by someone you know, but being called foolish by a complete stranger must have rankled somewhat. But then, this was someone they knew - they just hadn't recognised him yet.

So all three continue on the road with the stranger explaining everything that was said about what would happen to Jesus in the scriptures, how Jesus' fate was actually a good thing and the fulfilment of what was predicted long ago from the book of Moses to the writings of the prophets. This must have been fascinating to the two friends who were probably all ears. The 7 miles would have gone by quickly. They invited the stranger to have supper with them as it was getting dark, rather than risk injury or other misfortune while on the road at night alone. They probably also wanted to hear more of what the stranger had to say. The stranger accepted their invitation and they all sat down at the table together.

And this is when realisation dawns - in the blessing the stranger says and his breaking of the bread and giving it to them. A simple act, yet one that the friends have seen before and instantly they recognise the stranger as Jesus.

We've all had those moments of sudden realisation - the introduction to a piece of music that you can't remember the name of until hearing the first line of lyrics, 'getting' the punchline of a joke after a couple of days of thinking about it or finally seeing what is depicted in a picture made up of a lot of squiggles and dots.

This picture hangs in my lounge and is one that my daughter Lisa really dislikes because she can't 'see' it. With these pictures, you have to stand in front of them and focus on your reflection. You then get drawn into the picture which becomes 3D and the image can be clearly seen. It's hard to explain, but when the images from these types of pictures become clear, the feeling you get is one of amazement that all the different coloured dots and squiggles can make such detailed pictures.



For this particular picture, you will probably believe me when I say that the red area is the sun, the blue is the sky and the green is the tops of trees. What you might find harder to believe is that the trees are fir trees, there is one on either side of the picture and between them is a large nest with 2 baby birds with their mouths open. Right in the centre of the picture is an eagle, wings outspread with a fish in its right claw, coming in to land on the nest. Believe it or not!

I used to work for a car rental company which rented all sorts of vehicles from Mini Metros (remember them?) to 7.5 ton lorries. Everything, basically, which you could drive on a normal licence. Whilst out on hire, an Escort Mk3 was involved in an accident and the company who had it said they would get the car repaired and then bring it back to us. The day came when the client turned up in Reception and handed the keys over saying he'd parked it at the end of the forecourt. Off he went and out we went to inspect it.



It was a really good repair. You couldn't see where it had been damaged. And the car looked gorgeous with the sunlight glinting off its shiny new paint.

But as we stood there looking at the car, we all had the feeling that something was wrong. That this wasn't our rental car. But it had to be. The registration plate told us it was. So what was wrong with it? We just couldn't put our fingers on it.

Anyway, we all carried on with the day and every now and then, one of us could be seen standing by the car trying to figure out what was wrong. And then, suddenly, whilst I was standing in front of the car, I knew exactly what the problem was. That moment of realisation was like a 'bolt from the blue'.

Quite literally.

The car should have been blue.



The two friends on their way to Emmaus had their moment of realisation at their evening meal. They had felt something when the stranger was talking to them on their journey, but they couldn't quite work it out and it wasn't until the breaking of the bread, something that the two friends had seen before, that they finally recognised the stranger as Jesus. The two friends know immediately what they have to do - return to Jerusalem, find the disciples and tell them that Jesus *is* alive, that they had seen him and how they knew that it really was him.

How different the return journey must have been. This time, there probably wasn't much conversation but a lot of thinking as they hurried along, much happier than before. It was night, a time when they might never have travelled anywhere for safety's sake. But their news simply couldn't wait.

Eventually, they arrived, found the disciples and heard that Jesus had appeared to Simon. Then they explained what had happened to them and how they recognised Jesus when he broke the bread.