

Sermon for Easter 3A Luke 24:13-35
He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures
Dr Stephen Pietsch

Aha! Now I get it!

Have you ever had that experience of a breakthrough moment in understanding something? It's like something clicks into place and for the first time, something that you have been trying to get your mind round fits together and make sense.

Page | 1

I was once working with a family friend many years ago on putting a motorbike back together. We were trying to reassemble the carburetor and we just couldn't figure out how the parts were meant to fit. Remarkably, in flash of understanding I suddenly saw it how it worked, and was able to put it all together. The friend helping me said 'Stephen, you are genius!' That is the one and only time those words have been said to me, I hasten to add.

We often have this same kind of experience with spiritual things. There is a moment of breakthrough, where you joyfully see something in God's word for the first time. I used to see this a lot as I work with preaching students, is that they were struggling to piece together all the pieces of their research on the text they had done. It was all there, in front of them, but how is it meant to work?

This is what is happening with the two disciples here on the road to Emmaus. They are shattered, and also confused, because they thought they had it, but then it all turned out completely differently, and it did not make any sense. They knew Jesus was the Messiah, the one who was supposed liberate Israel. They had possibly even been in the crowd when Jesus came into Jerusalem hailed as the messianic king, waving palm branches. But then? He ends up crucified and is now dead and buried? So, as they walk along, Cleopas and his friend, they are not only deeply saddened and disappointed but also completely confused. What is God doing? I don't get it. Have you ever thought that yourself?

If you have felt like that at some time in your life, you are in good company. Because it was Cleopas and his friend here on the road to Emmaus who were confused about Jesus. This is how Jesus' 12 disciples were for most of the time during the three years they spent with him. Read the Gospels and you see that most of the time they have a very sketchy picture of what Jesus is talking about. Jesus teaches them and they say 'Oh right lets do this then!' and Jesus says 'No, you don't get it. No Peter, you are thinking human thoughts. Listen to me!'. Even after his resurrection, they seem to have only 'a bits and pieces understanding' of what Jesus' mission is, what is really happening and what their part in it is. And like those 12, these two followers of Jesus walking home to Emmaus had the pieces in front of them, but they couldn't join the dots. As Jewish men, they would have known the Scriptures of the OT, and they would have known the five Books of Moses, and the History and prophets with their promises of the Messiah. They believed God was sending his Messiah to save Israel, and they even believed that Jesus was that Messiah, but how it all fitted together *what had happened* they could not see:

- even though the prophet Isaiah prophecies that the Messiah would performs miracles and healings, and speak the word powerfully (as they observed in v.19);
- even though Isaiah also prophecied that this Messiah would suffer for his people;

- even though Jesus himself had said a number of times that he would be raised from death after three days, and here it is the third day after his death (as they lament in verse 21), and Jesus' body has (?) disappeared from the tomb;
- even though the women who went to the tomb had a vision of angels who said Jesus was live.

Even though all this was there to see, they do not see, just as, very ironically, their eyes do not see who Jesus is either. Even though they knew and believed in Jesus and followed him, they didn't understand. They didn't get it.

There is some indication in the text here that like Jesus 12 disciples, these two were hung up on the false assumption that Jesus was going to accomplish a political victory for Israel and overturn the Roman oppression of Judea. They say 'We had hoped that he was the one to *redeem* Israel'. That word translated 'redeem' in the text can also mean to 'liberate', in the political sense. How like human beings to look for human solutions to spiritual and eternal questions.

And this is, of course, the way *we* are too. By themselves, our eyes do not see; our minds do not understand; our hearts do not believe. As we were studying this text in Bible Study the other day, somebody pointed out that in Luther's SC, in the explanation to the third article of the Creed, it says: *I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him*. This is our situation as fallen sinners. Our ability to understand God's will and word is fallen too. We don't get it. We can't get it.

When we read on here however, we find that there is a breakthrough moment. Jesus himself, in his love, provides it, for these two foolish and slow-hearted disciples. He provides the breakthrough they have no hope of finding themselves. Luke's description of it in the Greek text implies that, as they discussed all by themselves, they were going back and forth, round and round in circles, because neither of them had a clue. Ever been in a conversation like that? They need a new insight in their discussion, a third person to bring some light. And so Jesus joins them, and comes into their confused conversation. And He *opens the scriptures* to them (v.32). Jesus, using the OT Scriptures, teaches them who he is (though as yet they do not recognize him) and shows how all that had happened to him in Jerusalem fulfills what is written in scripture about the Messiah.

Luke's telling of this story is full of irony and symbolism. Jesus is both the teacher and the content of the teaching – both instructor and lesson. As he goes back, even back to Moses in Exodus, and teaches right through to the major and minor Prophets, he shows how they all speak *about him*. The book that to them was closed, *He opens*, because only He can. He is the *Living Word* (the word that *became flesh* and dwelt among us, Jn1:14), and the very same one who opens up and interprets the *written Word of God*. The events of his passion and death and resurrection which to these two were completely incomprehensible, he *interprets clearly*, showing how they are all foretold, how the Messiah must *suffer and then enter his glory* (v.26).

Indeed it was *that suffering and death of Jesus* they could not deal with or makes any sense of. It was the cross that offended their reasoning. The glory part of it – well that was what they expected of an earthly political Messiah, who was going 'redeem Israel'. But then what we humans expect of God is usually far of the mark.

Jesus helps these two very sad and confused people see and understand the truth. And he is still doing this same work today with us and with people all over the world. Jesus, who is the centre and heart of the Scriptures, for us today, not only the OT but also the NT, still is the one who walks with us as we read and study and meditate on the Bible, showing us himself. Theologians have a way of describing this. Jesus is the 'material principle' of scripture – he is the main topic, the central message of the Bible, the main point, even in places in the OT where he is not named or explicitly mentioned, he is nevertheless present, setting the stage for the moment when He and his saving work will be revealed and made clear. As St Paul says in Ephesians 1-3, God made known to us the mystery of his will, which he planned in Christ, to be *revealed* when the time was right, and the time was right at that Passover in Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified and raised to life. God's plan at last revealed.

And so when we read and study the Bible today, Jesus, the one who suffered and died, and has now entered his glory, is the one who *opens it* to us. That is why you can be confident and expectant as you read your Bible or study it together with other Christians. Jesus himself is our Bible study leader, and he is content. He is the message, who opens up to us not just words on a page, but himself, his work of redemption in his death, resurrection and ascension. He is the one who calls to us in the Bible to repent and believe in him and his saving work for us. He is the one who sends us his Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies us as we read and study Scripture, who 'teaches us all things and reminds us of everything Jesus has said', as he promised (John 14:25-26).

This is how we 'get it' – get the truth of Jesus that it is, not because we are geniuses, but because Jesus himself, working through his Spirit, is our teacher. He gives us faith and understanding that we do not have ourselves. We are not the ones who break through to him. He is the one who breaks through to us, with his Gospel of life. And thank God for that!