

Resurrection (Luke's story)

Study Five



Noël Coypel, Resurrection of Christ, c1700

Opening Chat...

Have you ever been involved in organising or been the recipient of a surprise party, and if so, what were first thoughts as the secret was revealed?

Key verse...

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?'

(Luke 24:32)

Jesus has risen!

(Read Luke 24:1-12)

Luke misses a point which Matthew helps us with, in mentioning something resembling an earthquake causing the stone to roll away from the tomb entrance, and the Roman guards fleeing the scene at the sight of an angel and an empty tomb. Later, Matthew tells us the authorities bribed the guards to say the disciples had stolen the body (Matthew 28:11-15). The women, who included Mary Magdalene, were expecting to find the body of Jesus, having brought spices to finish anointing his body for burial. They did not expect the tomb to be empty.

The point that Luke seems to make in this passage is that no one, the disciples, the women or the religious leaders, having seen Jesus die on the cross and have a spear thrust in his side, was expecting the resurrection. Jesus had spoken of this, alongside the suffering and death that he must endure for the fulfilment of God's purposes. Yet to be

there, and see it all unfurl in front of their eyes had been so traumatic that, in their fear and sadness, no one had yet got beyond the point of grief, confusion and disbelief that it had happened.

The women listen to the words of the two angelic figures, who remind them of Jesus' own words, along with a mild rebuke for their confusion. Sometimes God speaks to us and we struggle to understand or accept what is being said, but we must have open minds and hearts to recognise when those words are being fulfilled. These things must happen, say the angels, and they are betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection. God will do what he says he will do, and the resurrection is hope for us too!

The other disciples, except for Peter, dismiss the women's testimony, which seems nonsense to them, but having learned the hard way of the dangers of ignoring Jesus'

word, Peter runs to the tomb and, seeing strips of linen, wonders what might have happened. Scholars have debated whether the words Luke uses implies faith, but consensus seems to place it rather as a 'first

step along the way of faith'. But Peter has learned a valuable lesson, twice, that Jesus means what he says.

Discussion...

- 1: Legally the witness of women was not acceptable in those days, but these were well-known followers and helpers of Jesus and the disciples, and their story is dismissed as nonsense according to Luke. How easy is it to understand what was going through the minds of the Eleven, and others who heard their testimony?
- 2: Luke notes that there were two angels, Matthew mentions one who opened the tomb, and Mark writes of a young man dressed in a white robe. Quite often in the gospels we find differences in accounts of Jesus' life and words. What does that say to you and is it a good or a bad thing?
- 3: How does Luke's description of Peter (in verse 12) speak to you?

The road to Emmaus...

(Luke 24:13-32)

We do not know who the two disciples in this passage were, though it is possible that they were part of the large number of people who followed Jesus into Jerusalem for the Passover. They may well have been on the streets waving palm branches, welcoming Jesus into the city, and were now making their way home, confused at all that had taken place over the past few days. Luke brings Jesus into their conversation, and we are told that they did not, at this point on their journey, recognise him. There is a recurring theme of travel in Luke, with Jesus setting out for Jerusalem in chapter 9, and here the two followers are journeying to Emmaus from the same city. Later in Acts, the disciples will begin their own journeys from Jerusalem as part of their individual evangelistic missions to wherever God sends them.

The conversation begins with Jesus enquiring about what they were discussing, and they

are keen to confess their disappointment that everything they hoped for seemed to have gone hopelessly wrong. This great prophet Jesus, who was going to save Israel, was dead, executed, and although some women had returned from his tomb with news that it was empty and Jesus was alive, sadly none of the disciples had seen him. Which gives Jesus the opening to reveal to them how all this was part of the bigger picture, the fulfilment of so many prophetic words in Scripture concerning the Messiah.

He opens their minds to the truth, but this is purely educational until Jesus takes them up on the invitation to stay overnight, and in the sharing of a meal and the breaking of bread, their eyes open and they realise who this fellow traveller is, and why, like the famous Methodist preacher John Wesley in 1738 they could find their hearts 'strangely warmed' in encountering the risen Christ.

Discussion...

- 4: Look again at the initial response of these two disciples when questioned in verse 19 and what does it say about their understanding of Jesus?
 - 5: How important is it for us to understand the relationship between our Old and New Testaments, bearing in mind the response of Jesus in verse 27?
 - 6: At the end of this passage the evidence mounts up, not only from the two disciples but also from Simon, and hopes are rising again. How easy is it for us to piece together the evidence presented to us within the gospels and be convinced that Jesus is Messiah, crucified but risen from the dead?
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Jesus appears to the disciples...

(Luke 24:33-53)



This is now Luke's third Easter narrative. No one sees Jesus in the first, in the second it is only two disciples who see him, but now it is the Eleven as Jesus interrupts ongoing discussions with the two from Emmaus and their exciting news. It is not the resurrection that is at the centre of this passage but the physical proof that this surprise visitor is Jesus and not a ghost, confirmed in another shared meal.

Luke expands on the physical proof of Jesus' resurrection appearances in his later writings

where he tells us, 'After his suffering, (Jesus) presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.' (Acts 1:3-4).

That the disciples were both startled and frightened by the sudden appearance of Jesus is perhaps understandable, but it is one thing to be listening to someone describing their experience, another to see in front of you the truth of their words. And yet, they struggle

to believe that this is happening, and whilst Jesus does not invite them to pinch him to see it is true, he gives them the option of touching him and examining his hands and feet if they are still in doubt.

The disciples seem resigned to the resurrection not happening, maybe even thinking this is a hallucination. But then Jesus open their minds, as he did on the road to Emmaus, by revealing the fulfilment of Scripture in all that had happened. Right at the start of their mission training he had told them, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.' (Luke 9:22).

Now the mission to extend Jesus' message worldwide was going to be in their hands once they had received the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke's account of the Ascension is brief, not because he considers it to be of little interest, but because he will expand on its significance in the opening chapter of Acts. At the end of this gospel we are told that Jesus gave the disciples a priestly blessing before ascending to heaven, and we leave the disciples worshipping continually in the temple, praising God.

Discussion...

- 7: Luke does not include the story of Thomas within this encounter, which appears in John's gospel, but what is the point about Jesus that the writer wants to get across, and why is it so important to our faith?
 - 8: Twice in the post-resurrection account Luke talks of the disciples having their minds or eyes opened so that they could understand the Scriptures. Is that something you have experienced and if so, how would you describe the moment?
 - 9: We leave the disciples worshipping the risen Jesus. It took them a little time to get to this point. These are the people who will continue the work of Jesus in bringing the Good News to the world. Understanding their story can help us to do the same. How might that be?
 - 10: The season of Lent has been a part of our Christian heritage possibly since AD 325 and the famous Council of Nicea. What is its importance in the 21st Century?
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For prayer...

Pray for your neighbourhood, and that in which your Church is located, that the message of Easter heard within its walls might be lived and shown to those outside, through your words and actions.