

10th April 2005. Easter Three

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Readings:

- Acts 2:14, 36-41
- Psalm 116: 1-4, 11-18 page 346
- 1Peter 1:13-25
- Luke 24:13-35

With the story in the gospel of the road to Emmaus, I asked the obvious question:
Where is Emmaus?
Its name means "warm wells".

The name appears only once — here in Luke's gospel, as the destination for the two travellers — Cleopas and the other disciple.

We are told it is about seven miles (11Kms) from Jerusalem or about sixty "stadia" (one stadia was one third of a Roman mile or about 201.45 yards.)

There is no modern Emmaus, but there are four places which are possible sites for the Emmaus of the New Testament.

The four contenders are:

1. **Qalomieh** (Colonia)

is about four miles west of Jerusalem on the main road to Jaffa (Joppa). The historian Josephus referred to "a place called Emmaus, thirty stadia from Jerusalem." The only objection is that this is about half the distance mentioned in the Gospel story.

2. **El-Qubeibeh**

is about seven miles (11Kms) from Jerusalem but on a more northerly Roman road. It was at this site in 1099 that Crusaders found an old Roman fort named Castellum Emmaus.

3. **Abu Gosh**

is about nine miles west of Jerusalem on the main road. There is also a Roman fort here, with an inscription that the same Roman Legion (of Colonia) was stationed here as well — this may identify it as the place mentioned by Josephus.

4. Finally:

Amiras which is similar in name and it has two "warm wells" (Amiras has been called Nicopolis since the third century) but it is twenty miles or about thirty two kilometres from Jerusalem.

Amiras has the earliest references in the historical writings of Eusebius and Jerome.

Other historical information points to this being the Emmaus of Judas Maccabeus. The Crusaders also accepted this as Emmaus!

The biggest problem is its distance although some of the ancient texts of the gospel suggest the distance of seven miles is wrong.

It may seem that this is the Emmaus of the bible. However, the fact that Emmaus is difficult to pin down has led people to think of it as a place where the disciples were going to escape Jerusalem — to get away from it all. They turned their back on Jerusalem in grief and anger and confusion and headed off "to Emmaus."

And so the Emmaus Road became the sort of symbol for retreats and escapes.

It became the place of spiritual journey and spiritual renewal.

websites — Emmaus is all about spiritual encounter and spiritual journey.

And so we come back to our reading:

The disciples are on a **journey**.

we might think of the journey of life
or a journey through sadness or illness
Even a journey of happiness:
getting married
having a child

The disciples' geographical journey was clear — to Emmaus
But they were on an emotional journey too.

They meet and are accompanied by a stranger.

The disciples are kept from recognizing him and they ask
"are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know
the things that have taken place there?"

[reminder: that so often the stranger, the unexpected, are
sources of God's grace and blessing.]

The disciples have had their hopes dashed.

"We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."
and they were confused because of the report of the women's vision and the empty
tomb. Hopes in the Messiah seemed to have come to nothing.

The stranger explains the scriptures:
was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer
these things and then enter his glory?
and beginning with Moses and the Prophets he interpreted
the scriptures.

The stranger then stays and eats with the two.

He breaks bread
and uses the familiar formula of words...

"Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus and
he vanished from their sight."

We never seem to realize the importance of the moment
until it is gone — it is only afterwards that the two realize
what has happened.

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road, while
he was opening the scriptures to us?"

And in a marked reversal of their spirits and attitude, they
return to Jerusalem to tell their tale.

The story tells of the Risen Christ:

- meeting his people on their journey
their journey of life
and the all important journeys through grief and

despondency.

- present in the strangers we meet along life's road and challenges us in the way we deal with them.
- the story tells of the Risen Christ restoring hope, opening eyes and overcoming sadness.

It tells of the Risen Christ:

present as we read and prayerfully seek to understand the scriptures .

present too as we break bread together. (Notice it is an ordinary house at an ordinary meal.)

It is not just in Church but as we gather in normal everyday situations.

In the Eucharist we celebrate Christ present in **WORD** and **SACRAMENT**.

Christ with us in prayer on the road of life, in the face of the stranger, when our hopes are down, in the word of God in Scripture and the Sacrament of Bread broken and wine poured.