

Jesus is With Us on Life's Journey

*My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colours
He weaveth steadily.*

*Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.*

*Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.*

*The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skilful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned*

*He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.*

- Author Unknown -
often quoted by Corrie ten Boom

The tapestry – a poem that was shared often by Corrie Ten Boom, the Christian Dutch lady who survived the holocaust.

Today our focus is on the two people, on the Emmaus Road.

Those first disciples were crushed as they made their way back to Jerusalem; their world had fallen apart; “We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel”, and in these words all their hopes came tumbling down around them. In those words, are emotions and these emotions are grief, sadness, anger, despondency.

As they journey back along the long and lonely road of grief, they could not see the stranger because of their despondency; they were aware there was a stranger with them, that he was in conversation with them, and yet they

did not apprehend who the stranger was who was walking with them on their dark journey.

Grief had blinded their eyes to Jesus.

It is also a picture of the Christian life.

There will be times of despondency; times when we lose sight of Jesus; times when we doubt; times of apathy and wanting to give up our faith journey. Read *Pilgrim's Progress* and see all the challenges that pilgrim faced on the road to Heaven.

Everyone who has walked the way of Christ has been there!

The resurrection encounters with Jesus, tell us a lot about the grief journey. They take us through different identified stages of grief

Denial

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance

All these stages are connected to grief but not always in that sequence.

Grief is a journey, that we all face at some point in life, and it's a painful and often lonely journey, as we walk in the shadows, and try to find glimmers of light and hope, often trying to make sense of the new situation that we are now in.

The two people on the Emmaus Road, were definitely in the stage of depression and denial as they head for Emmaus – we are told by Dr. Luke in his beautiful gospel, that their faces are downcast. It was obvious that they were hurting and already missing the one, whom they had placed their hopes and lives upon. He was crucified, the cruellest of all deaths, right in

front of their eyes; and as each nail pierced Christ's hand, so their light had slowly gone out.

As we consider the post Easter disciple's stories, a similar theme emerges, of bewilderment, lostness, hopelessness; the disciples, who are wandering about in thick fog, looking for someone to direct them and guide them.

Thomas, who literally deserted the disciples, after the crucifixion, was not there when Jesus appeared to the other ten, and when he caught up with the disciples, he was in total denial. He would not accept what they said, he could not accept that Jesus was alive. He had to see it for himself, and he had to bargain with Jesus, show us your wounds, show us that you are real!

Then there is the story of the disciples out fishing in the lake; well, they had to get food on the table or they would die. So, they returned to their old profession, and all night they toiled and caught nothing. What a lonely sad night, they had nothing to show for their endeavours. And come the morning, their boats are heading back to the shore so that they can go to their homes for some sleep, a stranger appears on the shore, and instructs them to cast their net, on the other side of the boat, and they did, and they struggle to pull in their nets because of the volume of the fish.

What wonderful stories of hopelessness and transformation; stories of real hope that in the midst of grief, disappointment, disillusionment; we can find hope, and we can rekindle the flame of faith.

Let us sing...*The King of love my shepherd is....*

Faith is a journey

What application can we make of this story for our own lives?

It tells us that God knows how we feel because He lost his Son. This story tells us that God walks with us in the darkest times. To those going through grief, he is walking with you in the shadows right now. You might say, "I don't see him John", and you are right, he wasn't obvious to the first disciples but it was later when they came to the end of the journey, and they reviewed the journey and they said together, "Didn't our hearts burn within us when he talked with us on the way".

We have a God who is interested in our feelings, our emotions; a God who is in our feelings. The psalmist wrote, "Yes, though I walk through the shadows of death you are with me. I will not fear evil for you are with me. Your rod and staff, they comfort me."

If there is any story in the Bible, it is this one of the Emmaus Road, that God is walking with us in our darkest moments, when our emotions are raw. As many know only too well, grief brings all our emotions to the forefront. We are literally on a rollercoaster. But knowing that God is in our emotions and with us as we journey can make all the difference.

God will lead us through the shadows of the darkest valley; that is the journey of faith, but as we travel, let us remember, it's just a shadow!

Shadows cast fear and can make us frightened; we know that from childhood, but for there to be a shadow there needs to be a light shining. God's light is shining even in the darkness.

This story tells us that the journey of grief can become a journey of hope. When the two disciples reach home and they share bread with the stranger, suddenly, their eyes are opened, and they see Jesus. For that brief moment, they catch a glimpse of their friend; perhaps they realise that the hands that broke the bread are the pierced hands of the One on the cross and their eyes are opened.

So, their journey of grief turns into a journey of hope.

Their emotions of sadness, anger, fear have turned to emotions of hope, joy, peace, praise as they make their way back to the other disciples to share the good news.

They were seven miles from Jerusalem, their journey of grief to Emmaus would have taken them a long time, but the journey back to Jerusalem, to meet the disciples, would have seemed like minutes as their lives were changed with meeting Jesus.

So, what about us, 2000 years on from these resurrection stories and these initial encounters with the resurrected Jesus?

This story gives us the opportunity to have an encounter with Jesus. Jesus comes to us through his spirit in different ways, at different times, different people, different places.

The Bible tells us to look to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. Look to him, to guide us through life and especially through the dark valleys into his light.

This story gives us hope. Hope that this life is not the end. Hope that ultimately God's purposes are good. Although we may not see a pattern at this time; we are called to accept God's will and accept that God is good; that He has a plan – greater than ours – that He is in this with us – and also with our loved ones – who have departed.

Finally, I want to encourage us and say that the resurrection of Jesus changes everything for us; how we live and how we die. It is the ultimate hope for this world.

I'm going to lead us in a short prayer and when I pause can we sing together the words *Kyrie eleison* three times... It means *Lord, have mercy* and the music is a Ukrainian traditional chant. No 776

Living God

When our heads are down and we have lost hope

May we see Jesus.

Kyrie eleison - 776

Loving God

When we feel that we are living in a confusing and hostile world

May we see Jesus.

Kyrie eleison - 776

Generous God

When we live as if this life is ours and not Your gift to us

May we see Jesus.

Kyrie eleison - 776

Compassionate God

When our hands are already full

and we feel unable to welcome the stranger

May we see Jesus.

Christ calls us –

"Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden"

From the self-centredness, contradiction and fragmentation of our lives

we turn to Christ –

the living water,

the bread of life,

the light of the world.