

Reflection on Cleopas and the other disciple on the road to Emmaus

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Cleopas they wrote about us, you and I travelling the road to Emmaus. Remember how we felt; - down hearted, disillusioned, and disappointed. I am sure that's how they all felt, the disciples; the followers; the believers. We tried to comfort and console one another but it has no effect. We had travelled that road many times and knew the way even though we were troubled, feeling mixed emotions and had great sadness in our hearts.

Was it only a few days ago that we had been so looking forward to being in Jerusalem for the Passover, meeting up with the apostles and more disciples and followers of Jesus, and joining with some of the women who ministered to them. It was supposed to be a great time of joy and celebration; who could tell then that it would all end in crucifixion?

When did it all go wrong? We had been so happy, full of hope. Yes we had hoped that He was the one to set us free, we had hoped he was the Messiah, come from God to save us.

But we were there, we watched and heard his agony. Our hopes were dashed and smashed to smithereens with each blow of the hammer, nails shattering flesh and bone. Yet I could not leave. I had urged you Cleopas, to go and hide, to stay in the shadows in case you were recognised just as Peter was; and I know you were afraid for your life, afraid for me and for all our friends. Most of the men disappeared and only the women remained at the cross with John. We too were afraid but as women with no status or standing in the community we knew they would not consider us a threat. But already there were spies looking out for his male followers, those who might cause an uprising or trouble. Yes it was best that you stayed away for your own sanity and safety.

There were three of us women; three Mary's who were present at the crucifixion: Mary his mother, Mary Magdalene and myself, Mary the wife of Cleopas. , a sister to Mary in spirit, but I could have been any relation for the word means any female family member. We were there as true faithful followers of this man Jesus.

And it was I that accompanied Mary Magdalene to the burial place where they had laid his body in a new tomb, and then sealed it with a large stone. We watched and waited and agreed to come back later after the Sabbath with spices and oils to anoint his body.

It was almost the Sabbath and we had no time to grieve. You Cleopas had sent word that you wanted us to leave Jerusalem as soon as possible, yet we could not travel on the Sabbath without drawing attention to ourselves, we could even be arrested for that. So we spent a wretched Sabbath, holding back our tears and grief, keeping everything inside. We were physically drained Cleopas and yet we could not express our emotions. There were too many people in Jerusalem; Pharisees, Roman soldiers, crowds who had gathered for the Passover. Who was a believer or who was a betrayer?

I know you were trying to protect me Cleopas but I couldn't leave without saying goodbye to Mary and our friends, supporting them if I could and then we would travel to Emmaus together.

I rose very early in the morning before you were even awake, met with Mary Magdalene and we made our way to the tomb. As we approached we were dismayed to find the stone had been rolled away. I tried to tell you, Cleopas that we met with an Angel of God and he told us that Jesus is Risen from the dead. The tomb was empty! I know you are sceptical but you weren't there. We ran to tell the disciples and tell them that they would see Jesus in Galilee and to wait for him there. The Lord is risen! and yet you do not believe us.

So we set out on that road, still early in the morning trying to fathom out what had happened, why it has happened yet neither of us could understand and the tomb was empty, where was the body? We were so confused. We were just two desolate figures, you thinking I had lost my mind and I myself doubting what I had seen and heard. We were in despair we couldn't console each other. We were angry with each other.

"You should have known better".

"You were too easily led."

"Yes but you believed him".

"You had hope".

Then we were angry at Jesus. "He hadn't even defended himself, he had duped us, if he was who he claimed then surely he could have done something". Then

we were angry with ourselves. “How could we have been taken in with this this smooth talker, this Charlatan, this sorcerer, this fraud,” and then “No, No,” we cried , “it was not like that; He was not like that”; and so we held each other and wept for what we had lost; our friend, our Saviour, our Lord, the Son of God, the Messiah; for all we had hoped; we poured out our grief to each other so much so that we did not see or recognise the stranger walking with us.

When he asked you the reason for our grief I thought you would explode. Was he the only person in all Jerusalem who had no knowledge of the recent proceedings?

I placed my hand on your arm, to remind you to be wary of strangers. But he encouraged us to talk about what had happened, how Jesus had affected and changed our lives. It gave us some comfort at remembering the words of Jesus, his deeds, his teachings, his healings, the love he had shown us and asked us to share with others. Yet what was it you said, what were those three words that summed up our feelings “we had hoped ”. Now all our hopes were gone.

And then it was his turn to speak, explaining the scriptures and all that had been written about the Son of God, our Messiah. We felt calmed and soothed listening to him and wanted to hear more.

Yet still we did not twig who this man was, but remembering what Jesus had taught us about being good and kind to strangers, when we arrived at our house we welcomed him in to share a meal. And it wasn't until the breaking of the bread in that different but Oh so familiar way that our eyes were opened and he was revealed to us. Our Lord was resurrected, returned from the dead, He is Risen and alive. Alleluia! And then He disappeared as quickly as he had come to us.

Cleopas, you said we could do nothing less than return immediately to Jerusalem to the other 11 who had remained there. We set off in haste to pass on this good news. No more doubts. Our sorrow and tears turned to joy. So once more we travelled that road, but this time in Jubilation - skipping, part running in our excitement and once more saying with confidence “we have hope, hope in our hearts, and a belief that He will not fail us. Alleluia!”

Today we too have that hope, we may not always recognise Jesus in our midst, especially in these difficult circumstances when we feel isolated and alone and troubled. but we can show his love. That is the only good thing that has come out of this Corona virus , is that we can show we care for the sick and dying, those who grieve and mourn, those who are vulnerable, the outsiders, those who are lonely anxious confused. We can pray and give thanks to those who are working so hard in the NHS and Healthcare sectors. Whatever we go through, because of those two on the road to Emmaus, we now have that constant knowledge that Jesus is with us always, yes even to the end of time. His love never fails.

So, Cleopas and your companion, we thank you for your story, for turning disbelief into faith, sorrow into joy and for believing in Him who saves. You give us hope, for when we don't understand or when we don't remember the words of Jesus in our despair and desolation and darkness we can be assured that He will come and seek us in our need.

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, when we doubt give us faith,

When we can't see or feel your presence near, give us courage and strength and reveal yourself to us.

Guard and protect those we love, keep them and us safe. Be our guide and defender against all that would harm us.

For you are our Redeemer, our Lord and Saviour. , Our Risen Christ. Amen