

Cleopas and an unnamed companion leave the disappointment and crowds of Jerusalem behind and make their way back to the village of Emmaus. What went down with Jesus during the Passover Festival left them despondent and their stance before the stranger on the road said it all: *They stood still, looking sad.*

Where to from here? How shall they pick up the pieces? What will it be to return to “normal” life after all they’ve seen and experienced?



Image: Road to Emmaus, © Daniel Bonnell

Now that the curve of crisis has been flattened in Australia, we may be looking to the future with a myriad of feelings and questions ourselves. Perhaps even new anxieties or a kind of reluctance to hope may be emerging. How will this experience have changed us? What can we expect going forward given the economic fallout and lingering global health threat? What of our plans and dreams will we—and our children—be able to recover?

The horizon before us may appear daunting at points. We may be tempted to stand still ourselves, finding it all too hard to reorient ourselves to the new situation. Like the two companions on the road to Emmaus, our hearts may be equally slow in coming around to what God is on about in our current realities and we may wish to retreat into the familiar, even if it is not life-giving.

As the two companions found, that which may appear to be a dead end is, in reality, a liminal space where God is present and active. But we must have eyes to see that another way is possible and the courage to move with the Spirit in new directions.

In his book *With Burning Hearts: A Meditation on the Eucharistic Life*, Henri Nouwen presents an image of the slowness of heart that prevented the two disciples from recognising Jesus and the way of death and rebirth he revealed. Nouwen tells of a meditation that was led by a presenter on TV. The presenter poured water on hard, dried-out soil, saying, “Look, the soil cannot receive the water and no seed can grow.” Then, after crumbling the soil with his hands and pouring water on it again, he said, “It is only the broken soil that can receive the water and make the seed grow and bear fruit.”

It is no wonder that it was in the breaking of the bread that Christ was finally recognised by Cleopas and the other. Beyond the obvious allusions to Communion, this story has me thinking about how Christ is often revealed in things broken open. In my experience, when the pretence of our outer shell is cracked, when life as we’ve always known it is falling to pieces, it is then that we might be able to catch a glimpse of the Holy shining within. Vulnerability is transparent.

For example, for me, a revealing moment came in the week prior to our final gathered worship as a congregation. Things were about to change, but just how much remained to be seen. In a teary conversation with a friend, I queried, “Who am I if can’t serve in the usual ways?”

Perhaps you can relate to my feelings. During these weeks, each of us has had to forfeit activities that we find fulfilling and help to create our identity such as grandparenting, volunteering, caring for an aging parent, working and sharing life with friends.

In response to my question, my friend gently said, “Yes, *who are you?*” bringing on more warm tears. His question directed my attention away from external forms to internal being—which is what moved me then. *This is who I am*, and with this God-created being, love *will* find expression somehow. It was a holy moment, an epiphany.

Similarly, the Emmaus disciples caught a glimpse of the sacred in their midst and then, just as suddenly, it was gone from their sight. But the resonance lingered and it was enough to fill them with hope and cause them to reorient their lives.

As with the Eucharistic meal they shared, the bread which is blessed and broken is *given to us*. It is we who ingest and carry within us the Presence that is revealed. We who take responsibility for tending what will be after the breaking, after the revealing.

The image below by Janet Brooks Gerloff is worth pondering in light of the Emmaus story and this time in history. Much is being revealed for those who have eyes to see, those who can sense the presence of Something More companioning us. As with the figure in Gerloff’s painting, that which is revealed most often comes in hints and whispers yet such experiences can leave a deep impression on us.



Image © Janet Brooks Gerloff

When have you sensed the Spirit sidling alongside you, bringing insight into how life might be?

What is breaking open and being revealed to you in these weeks of isolation and social distancing?

As we continue on the journey, I hope and pray we will have the courage to live as those newly oriented by what the Spirit has revealed in the struggle and pain, in the breaking open and gifting during these unusual days.

Poem II.22

From Rilke’s *Book of Pilgrimage*

You are the future,
the red sky before sunrise
over the fields of time.

You are the cock’s crow when night is done,
you are the dew and the bells of matins,
maiden, stranger, mother, death.

You create yourself in ever-changing shapes
that rise from the stuff of our days—
unsung, unmourned, undescribed,
like a forest we never knew.

You are the deep innerness of all things,
the last work that can never be spoken.
To each of us you reveal yourself differently:
to the ship as coastline, to the shore as a ship.