

The Road to Emmaus

“We were going on our way, minding our own business. Dwelling on all that had happened. It was tragic, awful, to lose such a wonderful man in such a way. Our teacher, our guide, our Rabbi. The one we had truly begun to believe was the Promised One. The one who could heal the sick and give sight to the blind. The greater the height of our hopes, the harder the fall. And in the depths of our sorrow, we heard that the body had been stolen. Just vindictive behaviour from some Roman thug under the pay of a religious leader who wouldn’t have dreamt of getting his own hands dirty.

As we walked, we talked together, Cleopas and I. Chewed over our disappointment. Rehearsed arguments about why, over and over. We were not keen to welcome a stranger, especially since we were afraid to broadcast our connection to a man who’d just been executed.

But custom dictated that a fellow traveller must be invited along and the conversation shared, and so his steps fell in with ours. I can’t say I even looked at him fully, for my face was red with tears and I was part ashamed, part defiant.

The traveller asked us what we were discussing as we walked along. His manner was buoyant, almost chirpy, grating with our secret shared sorrow. I had to bite back a put down. Cleopas, usually the gentler of us, replied in a voice dripping with sarcasm, “Have you been hiding under a rock this last week or something?” Or words to that effect. I think he half hoped that the traveller would get the hint and shut up. But no, we’d picked a right one this time. “Why, what’s been happening?” he asked.

Well despite ourselves we found ourselves pouring out the whole thing. Once we started, neither of us could stop. We should have been more guarded: we were risking our necks confiding in a stranger. He could have been a spy for the Chief Priest or something. But somehow this man, innocent and full of the joys of spring, invited confidence, and we unburdened ourselves without really thinking what we were doing. He seemed so young, and yet his face was lined and worn as if from a lifetime of cares.

As we reached the end of our sorry tale, Cleopas wiped his nose with the back of his hand. Surely this traveller would notice our distress and make a polite comment about our grief according to good manners. But no, not this one. No hushed sympathy and sorrow for our loss. He even berated us for not knowing our Scriptures properly. But before we could get really annoyed, his words began to make more and more sense. All the disjointed pieces of Scripture that we had heard our Rabbi speak of, began to fit together. At first we were hostile to his reasoning: what did he know about it, this young- old guy who had parachuted in, seemingly without knowing anything of recent events?

Then irritation was gradually replaced by amazement. This man really could teach. He spoke with clarity, wisdom and authority. Very like... but no, best not think of him, it was too painful.

By the time we reached Emmaus, we couldn’t think of parting from this man. We almost panicked as he went through the usual pantomime of pretending to refuse our offer to come inside and eat with us to break his journey. It suddenly seemed the most important thing in the world that he stayed with us.

So bread and wine were sourced and the table laid. Cleopas, as the elder of the two of us, reached for the bread first to say the blessing. The traveller laid a hand on his arm and looked straight at Cleopas. “Allow me,” he smiled.

He broke the bread.

The world shifted.

Our hearts lurched.

We gazed at one another. A thousand questions and emotions collided in our brains, none of them making sense. How could this be.. why didn't we... who...?

The traveller had gone.

Our journey that night was far from over.”