

Walking with Jesus: Walking with the risen Jesus`

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Preacher: Gordon McBirnie

[0 : 00] Good morning.

Good morning. Last Sunday, Norman, Tamsin and Gordon took us on a journey into Jerusalem with Jesus. We heard about the crowds, the excitement, the people who gathered, hoping to get a glimpse of Jesus.

Just so they too could say they were a part of it. We had everyone from fanatics to regular supporters and to those who just wanted to see what all the fuss was about.

It was a very public journey. So I want us to use our imagination for a bit. Because obviously social media wasn't a thing in biblical times.

But I want you to imagine for a minute how things might have been and how they might have played out if it were. You could say that on Palm Sunday, Jesus went viral.

[1 : 06] Everyone was talking about him. If you think about every one of those palm keys as likes or emojis, then he is raking them in. And the algorithm is pushing this story into everybody's feeds.

It's creating really good engagement, which I'm told is what you want if you want lots of followers. And you can imagine some of the comments on the feeds.

There would be some saying, he really is the son of God. There might have been one that said, that's my donkey. Hey, I can't believe Jesus wanted my donkey.

Love you, man. And of course, Jesus had his haters and trolls. Not everybody agreed with him. So I'm sure there would have been the odd jibe or two from a Pharisee in there.

Whether you loved him or loathed him, or really if you hadn't given him very much thought, that weekend, everyone had an opinion on him.

[2 : 08] But today's journey that we hear about in Luke 24 is very different. It's the polar opposite, in fact. It's not a big public moment.

It's a very quiet, personal, private one. It's just two friends having a conversation. And then along comes a stranger who asks what they're talking about.

It's hard to get much lower key than that. They were just walking along, talking things through, confused and little dazed by all that had happened.

At this point, if Jesus had had a social media team running his account, they would be shaking their heads. I'm sure they would have been used to him by this point, going off message.

But this drip, drip approach, where the angels have told the women at the tomb that he's not there. And now this. It seems so far-fetched with the angel.

[3 : 08] No wonder the disciples didn't initially believe it. Maybe the social team is hoping that this is just a teaser for a big reveal. They've pinned their hopes on some big, flashy, showy moment that would prove once and for all that he was the son of God and that he had risen from the dead.

But once again, Jesus undercuts that. He doesn't make it all about him. The disciples don't even recognize him as they're walking along.

This is not about getting likes or followers. This is about Jesus checking in on his followers. These two have literally turned their backs on Jerusalem and all that has happened there.

They're returning home, we assume, because they don't see what's left in Jerusalem that's worth hanging on to. And this moment is all about them and their needs, not Jesus asserting authority over death.

So after all the high tension of Easter week, here's Cleopas and an unnamed disciple quietly trying to make sense of it all. I think it's always a bit of a shock when you lose someone you love or look up to.

[4 : 23] And the world goes on. I mean, intellectually, we know it does. But it's called a grief process for a reason. It takes time.

There's often a lot to process before we can move on and return to our everyday normal lives. And as a result, we sometimes have to get back up and push on, even when we're trying to make sense of it all.

And that's what's happening here. And it's all very raw. It's the same day as the resurrection. Here are two followers of Jesus walking along from Jerusalem.

Shoulders slumped, hopes dashed. They're disappointed, confused, and grieving for Jesus the man. And the hope that he'd brought that now seems so far away.

They don't know what to make of it all. And all of us have felt that way at one time or another. We encounter times in our everyday lives when things happen unexpectedly.

[5 : 27] And we feel like we're in it alone. When the faith we sing about so loudly on a Sunday morning feels a lot thinner and shakier on a Friday afternoon.

These two followers had believed Jesus was the one who would redeem Israel. And now they can't reconcile the hope they had with the reality in front of him.

But Jesus didn't wait for them to get their theology straight before he intervenes. He doesn't wait for them to cheer up. He doesn't demand they have more faith or turn back to Jerusalem.

He simply walks with them and shares that moment. He walks alongside them on the road they're already on, asking questions, wanting to hear about what's going on for them in their own words.

But they don't recognise him. And I have great sympathy with that. Because, linked to my autism, I have a mild form of facial blindness, where you have difficulty recognising people's faces.

[6 : 32] And so this is the sort of thing that would happen to me. I often have conversations with people and I have no idea who they are. I'm smiling and asking them general questions until my brain comes back online and I can figure out who they are.

But that's not what's happening here. Jesus isn't saying, remember me, or even, don't you recognise me? Instead, it's an invitation to remember what their faith means to them.

It's not about Jesus the man, but the faith they hold dear. Emmaus is approximately seven miles from Jerusalem. So the disciples had plenty of time to talk this through, to find some meaning as they walk.

So that's what they're trying to do when Jesus draws near and asks what they're discussing. In Luke chapter 24, verse 18, we're told, one of them, named Cleopas, asked him, Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?

It's a bit pointy, isn't it? You can hear the incredulity in the words. He's barely suppressing his thoughts. Really? Who is this guy?

[7 : 48] And from it, you can see that Jesus really meant something to him. This wasn't just somebody who turned up on Palm Sunday to see what all the fuss was about. This is a follower.

This was someone who was invested in Jesus and the hope that he brought. Things have taken an unexpected turn. He is seeking meaning and understanding.

And he can't quite believe that this stranger is seemingly so out of touch. But it's just what he needs in that moment. Because it allows Cleopas and the other disciple to recount the events, expressing their shattered hopes and confusion.

That's really important. Because before Jesus explains anything, he listens and asks questions. He lets them tell the whole messy story with all its disappointment, confusion, doubt and all.

He creates the space where they can be honest. When I'm advocating for neurodivergent people in the workplace, I spend a lot of time talking about the concept of psychological safety.

[8 : 57] It's a term coined by Amy Edmondson, a professor at Harvard Business School. And while it's often reduced to feeling safe to speak up, it actually goes much deeper than that.

It's about being able to open up, admit mistakes and ask questions without feeling embarrassed, marginalized or worried about the reaction you will receive from those that you work with.

If anyone was watching casualty on the telly a few weeks ago, when the junior doctors, Mattie and Kim performed a lumbar puncture that went wrong, you've got an example of an environment that's sadly lacking in psychological safety.

They didn't feel safe to speak up or ask for help, and their patient is paralyzed because of it. What a contrast that is to what is happening in today's Bible passage.

Walking with Jesus involves honest conversation, sharing our disappointments and being open in prayer. Jesus is not afraid of questions.

[10:06] During times of doubt and confusion, we can be assured that Jesus walks with us. And that is exactly what Jesus offers these disciples on the road to Emmaus.

So today, we can bring our whole selves, with all our uncertainty, questions and raw edges, and still be met with kindness rather than judgment.

I got my autism diagnosis five years ago. The first time that I sat in church after my diagnosis, I cried. Not out of sadness or even regret, but because it suddenly struck me that God had known this about me all along.

How must he have felt when he listened to my prayers? All the years I had questioned myself, wondering why I felt different. All the moments when I tried to make sense of myself with incomplete information.

All those prayers where I expressed my frustration and doubt. God had been alongside, listening. Patiently, kindly, without rushing or shaming me for not knowing myself sooner.

[11:21] I realised that Jesus had been walking with me in every confusing chapter of my life so far. Offering a gentleness I hadn't yet learned to offer myself.

He had walked every step of that very long and confusing road alongside me. The Emmaus story shows us that Jesus is not afraid of our questions.

He doesn't flinch at our confusion. He doesn't withdraw when we're disappointed or he doesn't go off in a huff. He invites us to speak honestly, to bring our whole selves into the conversation and trust that we are safe with him.

And when we do, something shifts. Not always instantly or even dramatically. But slowly, in our own time, we look back and can say, as the disciples did, were our hearts not burning within us while he talked with us on the road?

This is often how resurrection works in our lives. Not by sweeping away every uncertainty, but by revealing that God has been present in the very places we thought were empty.

[12:36] It tells us that disappointment is not the end of the story. And that confusion is not a barrier to faith. So today, on Easter morning, the invitation is simple.

Walk with Jesus in your confusion. Speak honestly. Ask your questions. Ask your disappointments. Bring your disappointments. Let him listen. Because being known fully, deeply, lovingly is the beginning of healing. The risen Christ is not only found in the moments when everything makes sense.

Rather, he's found on the road. On your road. Walking beside you. Patient and kind. Waiting for the moment when your eyes lift.

And you realize that he's been there the whole time. He has known you the whole time. And he has loved you the whole time. Just as you are.

[13:40] And now we're going to say. Many of you will recognize this person. Anyone know who that is? John Simpson. Yes, a very well known.

Or veteran, I think he is now. A journalist and broadcaster. Now, John has the knack of being in the right place at the right time. If you look up a list of the places where he's been.

And the things he's witnessed. You can see that he's been present for many really world-shaking events. To name just a few. He was present at the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

In fact, famously danced on it. He must have been a younger man then. He was in Tiananmen Square during the massacre also in 1989. He stood alongside Boris Yeltsin during the KGB coup in Moscow.

And covered the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990. That's a busy couple of years for John that was. And that's of course just a few of the things that he saw. He can look back and see that he was part of events which people will remember for many years to come.

[14:49] And it made me wonder what event in history I would like to have been witness to. If we could go back. It might be fascinating to watch the moon landings as they happened. Or to listen to Dr. Martin Luther King give his famous I Have a Dream speech.

Or maybe one of the famous sporting events where Scotland beat a rival unnamed nation in football or rugby. Or maybe even Super Saturday in London 2012 Olympics.

Which has been named the UK's greatest sporting achievements winning six gold medals in one day. Or for those among us I know there's a few Formula One fans. Would it be nice to see Lewis Hamilton win his first championship?

I'm sure I would have to fit something about Robert the Bruce in. But I'm not sure which one exactly. But once you start thinking about it and thinking and remembering more and more things. You might think of some yourself that you would love to have been part of. But in today's passage we read about a conversation that would have been a wonderful privilege to hear. Verse 25 to 27 of our reading said. And he said to them.

[16:00] Now Luke doesn't tell us what Jesus says.

Of course he wasn't there. But presumably he asked Cleopas and his companion about it later. But Jesus looked back through what we now know as the Old Testament and showed them. Where it talked about him and his predicted coming. But Jesus wasn't reciting it. As if from a history book. He was talking about events that he himself had witnessed and brought into being. Remember what Jesus said at the start of his gospel. What John said at the start of his gospel. In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God. And the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. And without him was not anything made that was made. Or wonderful verses from Colossians.

[17:09] This great hymn that Paul wrote. He is the image of the invisible God. The firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created. In heaven and on earth.

Visible and invisible. Whether thrones or dominions. Rulers or authorities. All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things.

And in him all things hold together. And doing so. Jesus helped these two followers. To see that the cross had not been a failure. Or the end of something.

But a beginning. The resurrection wasn't a rumour. Or the result of hysterical wishful thinking. But the victory over sin and death. That was always meant to be. The natural reaction.

As they carried on of the two followers. Was to invite Jesus in to eat with him. Whoever this person is. He opened the scriptures to them. In a way that they had never heard before.

[18:07] And they really wanted to hear more. A light had been turned on. And by it they could see clearly. God's plan for the world. Through the Messiah. Now when I was at school.

I didn't do very well with maths. Anyone who's been the treasurer of this church. Could testify to that. In fact. It wasn't even maths that I ended up doing. But something called arithmetic.

I think maybe my teachers. Thought I wasn't up to maths. So they just stuck me in this slightly lower. Grade of maths. And I did sort of okay.

Unless you read the reports maybe. But one thing I always struggled with. Was long division. Now you had to make one of those. Complicated towers of numbers. And then somehow you came out. With something remained. Or something else. Now I found that. Struggled with that. I'm looking to see if I get any nods. Is it just me in the room. Or a few other people. Struggling with long division.

[19:05] But one day. My teacher. Who actually wasn't very nice. But on this occasion he was. Sat down beside me. And patiently talked me through. How to do it. And at some point. It just clicked with me.

It's subsequently unclicked. I still don't know how to do it now. But at that point. I then understood. How to do long division. And I can remember feeling very excited. That I finally could do it.

And went through a few. Just to show myself. That I'd done it. Thank goodness for. Phones now. You don't have to worry about. All that sort of stuff. Now. But of course.

That's a silly example. But you can imagine the excitement. Of Cleopas and his friend. As they heard Jesus explain. What they had up to that point. Never really understood. And Jesus joined them.

Picked up a loaf of bread. And broke it. Now if you look behind me. Again. If I'm not in your way. You can see this. Big stained glass window. At this exact moment.

[20:01] That Jesus broke that bread. And underneath it. It says. You can read it. Come up and have a look later. It says. He was known of them.

In the breaking of the bread. Now. The version we read this morning. Says. Their eyes were opened. And they recognized him. Which is true. And which is fine. But it lacks a bit of drama. He was known of them.

In the breaking of the bread. The bread. And. But the real drama. Actually happened. A minute. A second later. When Jesus. Vanished from their sight. Now last summer.

I saw a man outside the church. Here. Taking pictures of the building. And then I went out. And had a wee chat with him. And he asked if he could come in. And see the inside of the building.

It was a tourist from New Zealand. And so. I brought him inside. And he was absolutely fascinated. By this window. And he asked me. What the story was about. Told him this story.

[20 : 56] That we've just read this morning. And I got to the part. Where Jesus vanished. He just burst into laughter. And told me. That I was making that part up. And so. We got one of the Bibles. And we looked it up. There in Luke 24. And I showed him. And he was amazed. That a story like that. Could be in the Bible. So I told him. Well read the rest of Luke's Gospel. And then you're really going to be amazed.

At the things that you see. Are going to happen. And he left with that Bible. I don't know if he read it. Or left it somewhere. Or. But I do pray that. He met Jesus. Through reading that Bible. And reading about Jesus life. But he reminded me. Of the reality. Of this wonderful part of the story. Wonderful of course. But very ordinary. For Jesus. To disappear from that house. And reappear somewhere else. Was no harder for him. Than healing someone who was blind. Or bringing a little girl. Back from the dead. And the way for us.

[21 : 52] To encounter Jesus like this. Is to do what these two followers did. And invite him in. They made room for him. And chose to have fellowship with him. What happened in that room. Changed their lives.

And in this case. Quite dramatically. Those of you. Who have done some of the courses. We run. In church here. Seen some of the films. Will know that there are often. Some really wonderful testimonies. Of people whose lives. Have been changed by Jesus. In the second. Last episode. Of our very good. Bible course films. We saw a testimony. Of a man. Called John. Which is. It wasn't his name. But he changed his name to John. He was from Yemen. And he'd been a follower of Islam. But had to flee that country. After he turned his back. On that faith. And then when he was in London. He met a man. Who was from Syria. And that man. Gave John a Bible. And John opened it. At the book of Matthew. And there.

[22 : 47] Reading that gospel. He met Jesus. And his life. Was changed forever. He now makes videos. For social media. And that are able to be shared. With people still in Yemen.

And he's also having to be. Yes. A person who has to be. Very careful in doing that. Because it puts his life. In danger. But the same thing. Can happen to any of us. As we let Jesus. Show himself to us. Through the Bible. And allow it to change. Our hearts and lives. As happened to the two. Companions in that room. They recognized Jesus. And when they recovered. From the shock. Of seeing Jesus alive. Realizing that they just. Had a long conversation. With him. Over the seven or so miles. From Jerusalem to Emmaus. And seeing Jesus. Disappear before their very eyes. They gave this testimony. From verse 32. Verse 32. A wonderful verse. They said to each other. Did not our hearts. Burn within us. While he talked to us. On the road.

[23 : 42] While he opened up. To us the scriptures. Jesus will renew us. And our hearts. Will burn within us. As we encounter him. In scripture. And the other. In other people.

And in creation. And will go on. With the joy. And our witness. Jesus walks beside us. As he did. With the two companions. That day. And I pray. That we will welcome him. Into our lives. And open ourselves up. To all he has for us. Let's pray together. Risen Jesus. We thank you. For the example. Of these two faithful followers. Who loved you. And responded. To your witness. And wisdom. Help us to open ourselves. To you. And change. And the change. You can make. In our lives. In Jesus name. Amen. My god. My god.