Lectio Divina – Third Sunday of Easter - Year A

Contexts

Luke’s Gospel

* Luke was Paul’s companion and friend. Probably a Roman.
* Author of the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles – two parts of the same story.
* Written for Theophilus (meaning “lover of God”).
* Was Theophilus a real person or a generic title with which any Christian could associate themselves and feel the Gospel is written for them?
* An orderly account beginning with the conception of Jesus and John the Baptist and followed by infancy narratives about both – only Gospel to do so.
* Some themes: Jesus as the perfect human, deeply interested in those at the fringes (Luke’s Gospel is often called the Gospel of the Poor); compassion, healing, love, forgiveness, prayer, miracles, angels, important place of women, Kingdom of God
* Jesus, model of God’s perfect love which heals, forgives and redeems and fulfils all human desire.

Luke 24:13-35 – things to notice

* The Emmaus Story
* Notice the variety of human emotions which flow through the story.
* The ‘multitude’ of disciples who had accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem is now dispersing in dribs and drabs – presumably, going back home.
* The 2 disciples are on a journey – a favourite Lucan theme. Physical journeys in Luke symbolise the journey of mind and heart in discovering and accepting Jesus.
* They are ‘downcast’ and talking about what has happened – the death of Jesus.
* Jesus joins them, but they do not recognise him
* A conversation begins: “what are you talking about?” ….
* ‘Our own hope had been … to set Israel free.’ Are they still seeking a political liberator?
* “Some women …. angels declared he was alive…’ – note NOT ‘risen from the dead’, just alive (resuscitated?)
* Jesus unfolds the story of salvation from the Word (Scriptures) – Jesus leads them to look at the Scriptures through his eyes and recognise that what happened in Jerusalem is the fulfilment of the Scriptures – this is a journey though suffering and death which ends not in death, but in life. Jesus is indeed the one to ‘set Israel free’ but not in a political sense. Rather, it is freedom from sin in all its forms which he accomplishes on the cross. Only in Jesus is the full or true meaning of the Scriptures found.
* ‘They recognised him in the breaking of bread’ – the climax of the story. Luke means the Eucharist – notice the repetition of the Last Supper description: ‘He took the bread, said the blessing, broke it and handed it to them’.
* ‘And their eyes were opened’ – notice the connection to the other stories where eyes are opened, the blind see, etc. “The climactic moment of freedom from hopelessness, from a reluctance to believe the message of the women, from a limited understanding of scripture, comes in the breaking of the bread.’ (Mark O’Brien)
* Again, the eyes of the disciples are opened to recognise the presence of Jesus – a presence seen by the eyes of faith in the Eucharist.
* “It is the same Christ who suffered, died and entered into glory who is present to the disciples on the way to Emmaus and to any community which celebrates the Eucharist.” (MO’B) – note that recognising Jesus in the Scriptures and in the Bread are still the 2 fundamental elements of celebrating Eucharist.
* ‘Did not our hearts burn….’ – notice that contact with Jesus is about the heart being moved, not about the mind being filled with knowledge.
* The return to Jerusalem – the story began with the fragmented group of disciples leaving Jerusalem, but finishes with the community being re-established
* The disciples in Jerusalem tell their story (Yes, it is true …) and the disciples who have returned tell their story of what happened on the road.
* ‘…has appeared to Simon’ – Mark O’Brien offers this insight: ‘Luke alone of all the Evangelists reports how, after Peter had denied his Lord three times, Jesus turned and looked at him. Peter turned away and wept. Jesus has now come to free Peter from a burden too heavy to bear: the realisation that he had betrayed his saviour.”
* ‘Transformation’ seems to run right through this story. It is a story of the effect of the death and resurrection of Jesus – doubt turns to faith, sadness to hope, darkness to light, fragmentation to wholeness, death to new life. This is the mystery of repentance (conversion) in action – the movement away from sin, fear, selfishness, etc and towards, love, hope and faith –accomplished by recognising the Lord in the Word and in the Breaking of bread.

The Easter Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on for the Third Sunday of Easter?

In a sense, the Easter Gospels are a meditation about Jesus – who he is, what he is about, so that the disciples (the church) may learn how to continue his mission & ministry. The Spirit of Jesus is still incarnated in a physical body and communicated through the physical.

Year A Gospels

The Gospel of each Sunday is always from John except for the 3rd Sunday and the feast of the Ascension.

Easter Sunday: Christ, risen from the dead

2nd Sunday: Jesus appears to the disciples & to Thomas

3rd Sunday: Jesus and the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke)

4th Sunday: Jesus, the Sheep-gate

5th Sunday: Christ, the way, truth & life

6th Sunday: Promise of the Spirit

Ascension: Jesus commission the eleven (Matthew)

Pentecost: Receive the Holy Spirit.

The encounter between the two disciples and Jesus on the road to Emmaus encapsulates three of Luke’s emphases – Christian life as a journey, faith as seeing, and hospitality.

Gradually the mysterious stranger, who joins them on their journey, explains the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself. But it is only after the disciples invite Jesus to stay with them that they recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

The account is filled with emotions; those associated with the topic of discussion, the unfolding of sadness and despair in not finding Jesus alive at the tomb and the wonder of recognition through the sharing of the meal. The Gospel is also filled with contrasts; the two despondent men who had given up hope; the two women who had seen the empty tomb and believed the angels. Each time we gather to celebrate the Eucharist we are invited to “open our eyes and recognize him in the breaking of the bread”.

Reflection

Luke’s wonderful story of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus is another story of transformation through personal encounter with the risen Jesus.

It is a heart-warming story and we can easily identify with the two disciples feeling crushed by the weight of their shattered dreams. They don’t believe the story of the women that Jesus is alive. They don’t recognise the stranger when he walks beside them. Perhaps that’s because they are so involved in their own hurt and disappointment, and doesn’t that sometimes happen to us, too?

What does Jesus do? First, he invites them to share with him their story, he lets them talk it out. Then he draws them into the bigger story of his life, death and resurrection by unfolding the scriptures for them. In other words, he gives them a sense of perspective. He puts their story in touch with the bigger story of God’s purpose.

Their hope is being rebuilt and their hearts are beginning ‘to burn’ as Jesus talks. They are beginning to ‘catch fire’ again. When they arrive at Emmaus, Jesus makes as if to go on, but the disciples beg him to stay.

At table Jesus takes the bread, says the traditional Jewish blessing (like Grace Before Meals) and breaks the loaf and the eyes of these faithful, yet blind, disciples are opened to recognise him. The disciples can scarcely contain themselves and set out immediately to return to Jerusalem, eager to share their story. To travel at night in the ancient world was to risk robbery and death, but, they just can’t wait.

From being two sad, depressed, down-hearted, grieving men the disciples have been transformed into impatient, enthusiastic heralds of good news through their encounter with Jesus.

It is the same Jesus whom we encounter in our hearts and in the Eucharist.

Maybe we could spend a little time sharing with Jesus our story and listening more deeply to his.