

## AUDIO RETREAT

### Easter People audio retreat 2023 | Week Two | Two Disciples on the Emmaus Road [Luke 24.13-35]

#### Episode transcript

I love to walk. I need to walk. I don't know what I'll do if one day I can't walk. Maybe I'll have to go on walks in my imagination. Down those paths I've often trod, seeing what comes up. This time, physiologically we're shaped for walking. Our minds are naturally adjusted to the steady rhythm, the steady pace of footsteps.

Relationally walking invites us to connect with a world in which we're moving and with one another through our shared conversations. Spiritually, when we walk, our feet touch the earth and our eyes are open to the heavens. And in all these ways, God is present for us and we can be present to God.

Nowadays, there are any number of alternatives to walking, but in the time of the gospels, if you wanted to get anywhere, then walking was the way. It's not surprising then that Jesus' ministry is told by his walking through Galilee into Samaria, on the way to Jerusalem. When Jesus invited people to follow him, I don't imagine he meant make sure you keep three steps behind. He was inviting them to go on the road with him to walk and talk and to be open to wherever the journey might lead them, whatever that journey might give them. And so it is that walking comes into the Easter narratives. Two friends are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, musing on the unexpected turn of their road, the arrest, trial, and death of their Lord, puzzling rumours of his being seen again.

The stranger who joins them hears their experience as it unfolds, as they walk with their eyes turned now downwards and disappointment. Now forwards along the uncertain road ahead. You probably remember how the episode unfolds. The stranger reframes what they've shared in such a way that their hearts begin to burn with a hope they can't explain.

And then when they stop together to share food, as the day draws to a close, they recognise him, their Lord, in the breaking of the bread. I wonder whether the seeds of recognition had already begun to germinate through that familiar physical company, step by step, along the way. In the Old Testament, the prophet Micah sought to draw people back to the relational openness and integrity at the heart of their faith.

The Lord, he said, is not interested in grand offerings or elaborate sacrifices. No, this is what the Lord requires: to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

Walking expresses the heart of things, to move step by step with the other. This God who also walks humbly, choosing our company. Not then a God who waits for us to be

elsewhere, to get to a place of integrity and sinlessness and freedom, but a God who chooses to share the road with us towards these ends, navigating the difficulties of the path alongside us.

We live in an age when it's possible, strikes and roadworks permitting, to get from one place to another, in what past generations would've thought of as moments. Speed is all, and we've often found speed can be oppressive. The longing to move more slowly. It's a strong counter-current in our time, as slowly as feet move when they follow a path.

All the major faiths hold pilgrimage to be a profound and transformative spiritual practice, and more and more people want to take up that adventure. Many retreat houses have prayer labyrinths. There's one on the grounds of the Abbey where St. Augustine's has its home. Step by step we move, trusting the winding path, allowing it to lead us who knows where.

In the spiritual exercises, Ignatius Loyola suggests that reflection and walking may be natural partners. Walking for me easily becomes a form of contemplation. Not that I deliberately set out to make it that, it just happens. The physical rhythm of steps begins to still me. I become more receptive to the larger world outside me, rather than bogged down in my preoccupations.

Thoughts come, linger for a while, and thoughts go, and that in itself feels freeing. Walking loosens what otherwise might get stuck. I also find that walking becomes dialogue with God, and here the connection with the disciples on the Emmaus road becomes more immediate. Whatever is going on for me in that moment is there

as I walk, though I'm not setting out to think about it. And as I go over what's happened, how I'm feeling, Jesus falls into step with me. I don't know or feel this in any consistent way, but I've come to trust it is so. As the landscape shifts around me, so the soul scape of my understanding moves as if he, my companion,

had retold my story and in doing so, drawn me out of the miry swamps of familiar desolation into the solid ground of hope. Being cared for, not being alone, or on a less troubled day, just told me to look around me with interested and curious eyes and see how alive life is.

Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road, as he opened the scriptures to us? That kind and encouraging companionship on the road is so often a source of resurrection within our experience. Whether the road is an actual one or some kind of metaphor for our life journey,

conversations with those few close and trusted friends who have our good in their hearts and prepare to listen to our ramblings, and help us trace some kind of path through them. The writings of psalmists, poets, hymn writers, who give us words or pictures for what we

feel, but have no words to name. The generous wisdom of saints and mystics across the centuries whose experience, though different from our own, rhymes, gives us fresh understanding of this land we are traveling through and its possibilities.

It's that experience of being liberated from old, exhausted ways of thought, by the freshness of another's insight. This was Jesus' gift to those two friends walking to Emmaus, moving away from their hope. They told their story. He had all the time necessary to hear it. Step by step, they opened up about the events that had so shaken them.

And then as he went on listening, they shared the pain, loss and confusion they bore. That attentiveness might have been enough in itself, but rather than lead them there, he began to retell their story, taking out what seemed to them ill-fitting pieces that seemed to have no place together. And showing them how they belong to one another, how together they fashioned a life-giving narrative that burned within in its truth.

How would it be if the risen Jesus joined you on your road and retold your story? It's not a purely theoretical question. It's how it is, I believe, when we become open to his company. For the seven-mile journey to Emmaus made in a single afternoon, exchange days and weeks and years of his willingness to walk humbly with you and little by little, unfold your own mystery wonder Easter story.

Though it's not the only way, walking is as good a way as any to help Jesus' work of resurrection, move on within us. City street or woodland walk, any terrain will do, and this humble companion is not picky about company. He shares your or my road gladly. Rather than confront us face-to-face with the discomfort that might cause us,

he's content to walk by our side, looking out with us onto our world. We have a story to share and he is prepared to listen. He has our story to retell. Physiologically, we are shaped for walking. Our minds naturally adjusted to the steady pace of footsteps. Relationally walking invites us to connect with the world around us through our senses, with one another, through shared conversation. Spiritually, when we walk, our feet touch the earth while our eyes are open to the heavens. And in all these ways,

God is present for us and we can be present to God.

Risen one, help us to be aware of you as you walk by our side, to hear you as you retell our story, and to go with you as you open up the way of hope that stretches from this place.