**Sunday 23rd April 2023 Easter 3**

**Acts 2: 14a & 36-41; Luke 24: 13-35**

**Making sense of the unexplainable!**

**Rev David Coster**

For a number of years now I have been writing the history of my family. It has been an intermittent exercise. Every so often, I open the file in my computer and start writing again. As I have researched the Family story the one thing I wished that I had was my parents to talk to. Their voice added to the story would have saved me a lot of reading and researching. Their memories and recollections of events from the past would add a new dimension to what I have been able to discover.

I thought I would share with you my opening paragraph pf what I have written, as it stands at present:

“For a long number of years, I have been intending to write the history of my family in New Zealand. Why do this? Because I am very aware that with the passing of my brothers, Alan and Ray, and me many of the stories of our family history that we heard as children will be lost. We are the only male descendants of Edwin Barker Coster (our grandfather and youngest son of Charles and Martha Coster- the first settlers who arrived in Nelson in 1842) as all our cousins on the Coster line are female. So, any Edwin Barker line with Coster as the surname runs through us. Some of the future generation of that line with Coster as the surname will have both Japanese and Taiwanese as part of the genetic mix as my son, Mark, has two sons, Kotaro and Issa with his Japanese wife, Sakurako; and Andrew, Ray’s eldest son, has Jonathan and Daniel with his Taiwanese wife, Wendy. Stephen also has two sons, Caleb and Leo who may well continue the line. While Stephen has a kiwi wife, Karen, my guess is that Caleb and Leo’s children will be British as they are London based.

In fact, I wish that I had sat down with Dad and Mum and my uncles and aunties and questioned them as to their memories of their childhood and what it was like growing up during World War 1, the great flu of 1919-1920, the Great Depression and serving and living during World War 11. I know that these events affected them and their outlook on life for they were very cautious in their use of money and my parents were concerned that their three sons may have to serve if there was to be another war.”

What I have learned through this writing is that much of what I am writing is dependent on recall and a lot more is the joining of the dots. The furthest that I have been able to go back in time is to William Costern who was born in 1685. He married Elizabeth Baldwin. They lived in a village called Sarratt, just out of Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. Spelling can’t have been a priority for at times the family name is recorded as Costard, Costern, and then Coster.

Why tell you this? Because my research of my Family story is a little like the early disciples of Jesus telling the Family story of the Church. Much of what is written in the Gospels depends on a source we know as Quelle which in German means “source”. This source was probably oral tradition. It is that oral tradition that I have lost from my family and now am trying to rediscover.

The early disciples of Jesus expected him to return to earth in their life time but as more and more of them died so they realised that what they had learned from Jesus throughout his ministry was dying with them. Hence, they wrote down what they had learned and heard. We have this record in the four Gospels and in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Luke who wrote the third Gospel also wrote the Book of Acts. He was a physician.

Not all of them told the story, or narrative, in the same way. In places their accounts differ – which is to be expected. John, recorded his Gospel tradition quite differently to that of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Yet, all of them were attempting to make sense of what they had heard from Jesus and also what they experienced through him.

Towards the end of his Gospel John wrote, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.”

There we have captured in a few words the heart of why the disciples recorded in Scripture the Jesus event – his life, death and resurrection.

The Emmaus Road story is part of that tradition. It is like a dot-to dot puzzle where joining the dots reveals a bigger picture. (A little what I am trying to do in my family history) The disciples draw on their past and recent experiences. They draw on their knowledge of scripture. They add in their expectations of Jesus based on that experience and knowledge. They draw on the interpretation of Scripture offered by the stranger who walks with them. They draw on their culture to offer hospitality-and that decision proves to be the key. But the final piece eludes them until the stranger takes bread and breaks it. Then the picture is complete. They see the risen Christ; they recognised who the stranger was who had walked with them, then he vanishes from their sight.

So inspired were those disciples that they walked back to Jerusalem in the dark risking being robbed and killed. There they discovered that they were not the only ones to have had an encounter with the risen Jesus. He who was crucified, dead and buried was making himself known in mysterious ways to his disciples. What were they to make of these mysterious encounters? What are we to make of what they have recorded for us? What are we to make of their changed lives?

For all of us it is a faith response to the first witnesses of the Christian story. For them, they finally realised, God was present and active in Jesus. The ministry and teaching of Jesus, his death and the resurrection encounters were beginning to make sense.

Let us look briefly at the story of the disciples on the Emmaus road. Are there learnings for us from this?

1. Why couldn’t they recognise Jesus? They had been with him for three years. Surely, they knew his voice. This raises for us the question of how much the resurrected Jesus differed from the Jesus of Nazareth. The disciples, even in their grief, were astonishingly unaware of who they were walking with.

Can we also be unaware of the resurrected Jesus when he walks with us?

1. Jesus asks questions of the disciples and lets them tell their story.

What do we learn from this?

Before we can be heard, the people we are with need to know that they have been heard and that we have felt the pain in their story in all its sadness. Jesus’ conversation with the two disciples was not about giving answers but about bringing a bigger perspective to what they were experiencing. He set what they were struggling with in context.

1. In verse 29 the two asked Jesus to stay with them. The conversation with Jesus had left them buzzing. They didn’t want it to end! Jesus relents and allows His direction, His timetable and His day to be altered at the request of these two befuddled followers. And by doing this their lives were impacted in a way that still impacts on us today.

This raises for us the question of how much we allow others to set the timetable in order to meet their needs when we are talking to them.

1. Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread. (v35)

Communion opens our eyes to Jesus and all that he means. Hospitality and taking time to share a meal is a wonderful way to engage with others and to hear of their deepest, sometimes unmet, needs and questions.

1. As soon as the disciples recognise Jesus He vanishes from their sight-the first of several such shadowy post-resurrection appearances The disciples receive no instructions from Jesus about how to live. The direction comes from the transformative power of the encounter with the risen Christ.

Amazing how this is still the case for we modern disciples isn’t it.

To God be the glory. Amen