

Luke 24:32

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

I don't know the exact date in September 1971 that I met Trevor Evans – ‘Mr Evans’ to me

- A formidable Welshman, not to be messed around, he was my new Geography master
- And, later, he was the one, more than any other, who leaned on me to take a place in Higher Education

Again, I don't know the exact date, but I think it was November 1975 that I met Donald English

- In his native Consett, he only joined the Boys' Brigade because they had a football team
- But became one of the greatest ever Methodist ministers and came to Plymouth on a mission
- I encouraged some school friends to go with me to hear him and when given the opportunity
- At least one went forward to pledge her life as a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ

On Sunday 6 November 1976, I met Gareth Crossley – a fiery preacher from Wakefield, Yorkshire

- Who was then the preacher at a small independent church at Wigston, Leicester
- It was my first autumn in Leicester and I was taken to the church by a student friend
- Gareth preached from the Bible in a way that touched my heart and open my mind
- And I wanted all my student friends to hear him – many did and some became followers of Jesus

In July 1982, I met Stanley Johnson, a Manchester-born Methodist minister serving in Blackburn

- Stanley Johnson also did a lot of work in Atlanta, Georgia, has accent reflecting the contact
- I had been on the train from Plymouth since the early morning when I arrived at Blackburn station
- I was sent to work with Mr Johnson as part of my training to be a Methodist minister

As I got off the train, I saw a man in a minister's dog-collar waiting on the platform

- 'Hello Mr Johnson, I'm John Haley' – I was wearing smart shirt and pullover, nice jeans and shoes
- He looked at me intently, 'Are you what we are turning out of Wesley College these days?'
- 'Well, I suppose so, Mr Johnson, here I am'
- 'Goodness me,' he said, looking me up and down, 'I hadn't expect you to arrive in civvies?'
- 'Civvies, Mr Johnson?'
- 'Okay,' as we walked to the car, 'let's get this straight before we start ...
- When you work with me, you'll be properly dressed, jacket, clerical shirt and collar'
- And so began five weeks of my running behind my new supervisor who would become a friend
- 20 years later I read an item to Stan Johnson from the journal that I had to keep to record my visit
- 'Are we working on Monday, Mr Johnson?'
- 'I am planning to, why do you ask?' 'Well, Monday's a Bank Holiday, Mr Johnson'
- 'Bank Holiday? Goodness me, I'm not a bank!' We laugh together, 'did I say all that, *really?*' he asks
- 'Yes, Stan, you did – but I loved every minute of it and I wouldn't change a thing'

Trevor Evans, Donald English, Gareth Crossley, Stanley Johnson – just a few significant people

- In addition to the members of my own family, who changed my life
- But there is one meeting, more than any other meeting, that changes the life of ordinary people
- And in today's Bible passage, we have it – it is the meeting with the risen Jesus

The accounts of the women and men who met the risen Jesus, not just the Eleven faithful disciples

- Form an important part of the four Gospels that tell us about the life and death of Jesus Christ
- And the significant questions are these, what exactly happened? And can it happen today?
- To do this we consider the empty tomb, the risen Lord, the warmed heart

I THE EMPTY TOMB

Unlike many other beliefs, Christianity claims to be rooted in history

- Luke, who wrote between one-quarter and one-third of the New Testament, more than Paul or John
- Shows that the essential message of Jesus Christ is rooted in history – Luke intends to write history
- Uniquely Son of God, Jesus was born in the time of Herod, King of Judea (Luke 1:5)
- When Augustus was Emperor and Quirinius Governor of Syria (Luke 2:1-2)
- Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of the time (Luke 22)
- The Roman historians Tacitus and Lucian affirm that Christ died under Pontius Pilate
- In fact, the death of Jesus Christ is the best attested death in the ancient world – but did he rise?
- Each of the four Gospels tells us about the empty tomb – we can deal with some possibilities
- The enemies of Jesus are unlikely to have moved the body – it was they who posted the guard
- The friends of Jesus are unlikely to have moved the body – it was they who buried him
- Why would they want to desecrate his grave? The case for the empty tomb is compelling

II THE RISEN LORD

The story of the two friends walking to Emmaus and meeting a stranger on the way, is unique to Luke

- At first it seems as if Jesus is the only one without up to date news – that Jesus has been killed
- But soon we see the two disciples are without up to date news – that Jesus is alive
- Of course, the story of the empty tomb is important, but all it really proves is that the body was gone
- But the stories of the men and women who met the Jesus are evidence too
- The men and women followers of Jesus that fill the pages of the Gospels are not typically gullible
- impressionable, unstable – and when they meet the risen Lord, they don't find it easy to believe

III THE WARMED HEART

The story of the two disciples walking to Emmaus is vitally important for Methodists

- the question they asked each other (Luke 24:32) is simple
- Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?
- It is this verse that helps us to understand what our founder John Wesley meant when he wrote
- ‘I felt my heart strangely warmed, I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation’
- But why did it suddenly dawn on the two disciples that the stranger was the risen Lord?
- Interestingly, Luke 24:16 says, ‘they were kept from recognising him’
- Contrasting with Luke 24:31 which says, ‘their eyes were opened and they recognised him’
- From the narrative, it appears that it is only when they start to believe that the reality comes to them
- They listen to Jesus retell them the Bible story about himself – and suddenly they believe

There is no more profound meeting that can change the lives of ordinary people, than meeting with Jesus

- They listen to Jesus retell them the Bible story about himself – and suddenly they see him alive
- If we are only willing to listen to the retelling of the Bible story of Jesus – we can know him too
- In the Bible story, we meet two ordinary men, with shattered dreams, going home
- They knew that Jesus had died, they knew that he had been buried, they knew that the tomb was empty
- They knew about women seeing a vision of angels who said he was alive
- But they did not know that Jesus was alive – and their lives were unchanged
- Until they met the stranger on the road, he preached from the scriptures, and they listened
- And their hearts burned within them – and faith and sight progressed together, they believed and saw
- That Jesus is alive – and they returned at once to Jerusalem, only to be told the news
- ‘The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon’ (Luke 24:34)