

# JESUS VIA THE STRANGER

Text: Luke 24:13-35

## SERMON

“Don’t say more!”

That’s an expression we often use and hear. When someone is telling you about a book or a movie and you fear he or she is going to give away the whole plot. Then the fun of being taken in by the story and surprised by the plot and outcome will be gone.

We experience the same problem with a well-known story, like that of the Emmaus travelers in Luke 24. The fact that we already know the outcome, makes it difficult to listen to the story as if for the first time and being drawn in in such a way that we don’t miss the message.

We already know that the stranger who came along and joined them on the road, was Jesus. We already know that they have said afterwards that when listening to him while he explained the scriptures, gave them a burning sensation in their hearts.

The effect of this pre-knowledge is that we read the story as if *they* also have known that they are walking with Jesus and that they actually have invited Jesus

into their home. If we read the story like that, we can easily translate that into a message that says you should allow Jesus to be your companion and that you should invite Jesus into your home, as these people have done,

But the fact is that it wasn't Jesus whom they encountered and invited. It was a complete stranger for them. With hindsight they declared that they became so excited. But it didn't happen because they recognised Jesus. It was just a man who came and walked with them and whom they invited to spend the night with them. We must purposefully try to read the story as if we don't know it. They didn't know who was walking with them and they didn't know whom they invited to be their guest.

Therefore the message can not be that we must recognise Jesus and remember to invite Him into our houses. Such a message can be found in other texts, but not in this one. No, this one reminds us of the godly potential that there is in an encounter with a complete stranger.

This story needs to be read against the backdrop of the motivation for the writing of the Gospel of Luke.

With the temple that was destroyed 70 years after Christ, the Gospel according to Mark was written to remind them that they should trust upon the God of the exodus – the God who creates redemption in the

hour of need. Although the temple is completely destroyed and although Jesus was crucified, God makes a new start. That is why the most of the Gospel of Mark is about the suffering and the crucifixion. Mark can be seen as an extended report on the suffering of Jesus. The message of **the cross is presented in the hour of the greatest despair**. 'n Message of hope is growing out of the biggest humiliation, the humiliation of God himself. And thus Jesus is portrayed as the actual, real temple. The temple that can not be destroyed because it will be rebuilt within 3 days.

Most likely the **Mark** Gospel was used as a **liturgical text** during the dark days that followed the destruction of the temple. But then, after about 10-15 years another two gospels (Matthew and Luke) came into existence. And one wonders what the need was for more gospels?

By that time, **the situation has changed** and thus other issues took centre stage. There were pressing questions about the new Jesus movement and how it should develop. **Paul was already a strong influential** figure in this new movement. He became a leader in taking the gospel to the outside world. Some scholars think that Luke has written his two books (Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles) as a defence of Paul over against others who felt that the movement should remain mainly a Jewish thing.

The gospel according to Matthew put the emphasis on the Jewish roots of the Jesus movement. Therefore he starts his gospel with a genealogy of Jesus going back to Abraham. Luke on the other hand, also starts his gospel with a birth story and in the 3rd chapter includes a familytree, but instead of going back to Abraham, goes back to Adam

In many other ways Luke places the Jesus story within a greater context. He tells the birth story against the backdrop of the emperor August. He later in the gospel tells the story of the 10 lepers who have been healed by Jesus. Only one of them return to thank Jesus and he is a Samaritan. It is also Luke who tells us the story of the good Samaritan.

Thus, where Matthew puts the emphasis on the Jewish background of Jesus, Luke helps us to understand His universal significance.

Against this background we have to read the story of Emmaus. It is a story of the stranger entering the stage and becoming Jesus for the insiders. If we can manage to listen to the story of Emmaus as if for the first time, the message is clear: Don't expect Jesus to join you on your life's journey, it will most likely be a complete stranger that you have to deal with. The question is not what you do with Jesus in your life, but what you do with strangers that you

are confronted with. We need to make **decisions every day about strangers**. All kinds of strangers. People we don't trust, people we have labeled and about whom we have negative stereotypes. Jesus has a strange way of hiding behind those types. He enters our lives on the feet of such people.

The story of Emmaus is not a romantic one. To the contrary, it is a difficult story with **far reaching consequences** for us.