

Lent and Easter

a friend who walks our way

AIMS

To explore our understanding of mission in light of the Emmaus story and to examine how we can respond to this in prayer.

INTRODUCTION

This activity is best done in a small group setting, but can also be used for personal reflection. The session is in three parts; when done in a group (6-8 people) each part can take up to 30 minutes.

1. GETTING STARTED

Bible: Read, retell or remember the story found in **Luke 24: 13-32** together.

Share this reflection with the group by reading or retelling it or ask members to read it for themselves.

This passage is set on Easter Day, after the women have found the tomb empty and are told by two men in dazzling clothes that Jesus has risen. They return from the tomb and tell the apostles what has happened, but their story seems "pure nonsense" to them. Later in the day two of Jesus' followers are walking to Emmaus and are talking about the events of the past few days. And then Jesus himself comes near and walks with them. Christ meets them in the moment of their bewilderment and sadness; comes close to them and, taking the stories they are familiar with, explains something of his true nature - sharing the good news that God loves us and in Christ has become like us. In Christ we see a God who has made the difficult and precarious journey towards us in order that we might journey with him.

Because God has come to us, it is helpful in Christian mission to begin with thinking about our own experience. Think of times and situations in which we have recognised God's coming to meet us and then find ways of opening these experiences up to others. However, we must not stop there; we need to go further. Individually and as a faith community we are called to express the life of Christ. So, in the same way that Christ has become good news to us, our calling is to be good news in person to others and to our communities. In his book 'God has a dream' Desmond Tutu expresses this as us being partners or fellow workers with God who provide God with the raw materials for performing miracles: ourselves (pp. 59-60).

DISCUSS TOGETHER/REFLECT

1. Who in your life has brought the love of God close to you? What effect had this had on you?
2. How has this enabled you to bring good news in person to others?

PRAY TOGETHER

When the discussion has come to an end spend some time in prayer thanking God for the people in your life who have shown you God's love.

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2. MOVING ON

Share the next section with the group or ask members to read it for themselves.

In the story from Luke, Jesus asks the two what they are discussing and by doing so allows them to tell their story. He listens to them and genuinely wants to know how they are seeing things. This is crucial to our approach in mission. Many attempts at mission begin with the sinfulness of humanity and seeking to convince people of that. Sri Lankan theologian D.T. Niles once said that one of the crises facing mission is that we Christians are more convinced of “our need to be in mission” than of the “need of our neighbours to hear the gospel”. If we truly believe that the gospel is for and about our neighbour, we must be more prepared to listen and we need to start where our neighbour wants to begin. This offers a new perspective on mission. Mission is then about joining people on the journeys of their lives; making space for their stories and deepest questions in the manner of Christ on the way to Emmaus. It becomes a continued pilgrimage with others to help them trust the God who identifies with them in Christ.

In the Emmaus story Christ’s coming close is for a purpose. He wants not just to accompany the two disciples, but to transform their lives. His companionship is in order to lead them to new life. From the other side of the grave of despair and hopelessness, the resurrected Christ offers the way to life and renewed hope. Being in mission then means walking with those who are suffering, blinded by disappointment or grief, and to hold up to them an image of a different reality.

DISCUSS TOGETHER/REFLECT

1. Listening to the people in your community, what are the stories they want to tell?
2. What would constitute new life and new hope for your community?

PRAY TOGETHER

When the discussion has come to a close, pray for your community and the concerns that have been raised.

3. MOVING FURTHER ON

Share the next section with the group or ask members to read it for themselves.

The Emmaus story ends with the three sharing a meal together and it is in the simple act of taking, blessing and breaking the bread that the two recognise Jesus. In the simple encounter there is a glimpse of holiness. Christian mission has often worked on the premise that the missionary is the one bringing the holiness to the encounter, as if God is not there until the missionary arrives. But why do we engage in mission? Is it because God is present with our neighbour or because God is absent? In ‘God has a dream’ Desmond Tutu states, in the spirit of St Paul, that each person is a ‘God carrier’, concluding from this that human beings must not just be respected, but be held in awe and reverence. “If we took this seriously”, he says, “we should not just greet each other. We should really genuflect before one another. Buddhists are more correct, since they bow profoundly as they greet one another, saying the God in me acknowledges the God in you” (p.63).

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For those of us brought up within the church it is not easy to learn to see others in this way. Yet in our increasingly diverse, multi-cultural and multi-faith world, this is an essential lesson to learn. Jane Leach, reflecting on her pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, suggests that the concept of being a guest can help churches to focus beyond themselves, acknowledging at the same time that this is difficult for churches that have been used to power and influence. "We are not used", she says, "to articulating and explaining our beliefs, we are not used to starting where others want to begin, and we are not used to naming God in unfamiliar places. Perhaps it is the art of being the guest that Christians in the West most need to recapture (...) if we are to experience holiness in encounter with those who are different from us and participate in the kind of community to which God is calling the whole of humanity" (p.93).

DISCUSS TOGETHER/REFLECT

1. Think of someone whose culture, religion or way of life is different from yours. How can you open yourself to what they may have to teach you?
2. What does it mean for the church to be a guest in our society?

PRAY TOGETHER

Draw the session to a close by praying together using this prayer:

Friend who walks our way,
before the day is over
change the focus of our seeing
and help us to be aware of your presence.

Friend who walks our way,
before the day is over
capture our hearts and minds
and help us to hear you in the voices of unexpected people.

Friend who walks our way,
before the day is over
show us the path to follow
and help us to support those who have lost their way.

Friend who walks our way,
before the day is over,
fill us with your love
and may your reflection be seen in us
as we break bread together.

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Friend who walks our way,
before the day is over,
make yourself known to us
and we will sing your praise
and shout with many voices:
Hallelujah, our God reigns.

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EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

There are more items for Lent and Easter on the website.

Acknowledgements

This material was written by Francis Brienens who has given permission for it to be used in the Vision4Life process. For a fuller version of this and other studies on aspects of mission, go to [www.urchurch.org.uk/what we do/](http://www.urchurch.org.uk/what_we_do/) mission/link for Notes to accompany the Mission Creed.

References/Resources

J. Leach (2007), *Walking the Story, in the steps of saints and pilgrims*. Peterborough: Inspire.

D. Tutu (2004), *God has a Dream*. London: Random House.

HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group about general or website V4L issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

If you have comments and particularly contributions to the prayer year, you can email the V4L prayer year coordinator via prayer@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk