

CHAPTER 2:

Emmaus and Eucharist

In the previous chapter, we primarily examined anthropological matters: how we function as human beings, the roles of habit, narrative, memory, language, and desire in our lives. Above all, we saw the ways in which we are other-dependent for all of the above. This was to prepare us to make better sense of the theological matters we're going to be looking at. By sitting with some of the things we saw in the last chapter, we will be in a much better position to appreciate the texts of Scripture at which we will be looking going forward. Here however we are looking into a very particular text from Scripture: Luke 24, 13-35, the "Road to Emmaus".

Before we actually look at the text, I'd like to stress its centrality to the whole project of our course. This passage is going to be something like the axis around which we will be spinning. We'll return to it later, in light of what we learn, allowing it to set the criteria for what we are being inducted into.

Most of us have heard these verses read before. We are used to hearing them as a sort of miracle story. I want to suggest that we have here something far richer, more sophisticated, more exciting—and indeed more miraculous—than a mere miracle story. Luke is a remarkably sophisticated narrative writer, and here he has taken something that happened (an appearance of the Risen Lord to at least two individuals very shortly after the Resurrection) and set it out in such a way that he is not only telling a story. Instead, he's giving us a considerably detailed and sophisticated answer to the question of its interpretation—what we would nowadays call a *hermeneutical* question. He is setting out the framework by which Christians answer the question "Through whose eyes do you read these texts that we call the Scriptures?"

One of the factors which blinkers us in our reading of the Scriptures is our modern presupposition that the authors of these ancient texts, and thus the texts themselves, are somehow primitive; that we are much more sophisticated than they were. Because of this, we read the texts of Scripture as if they were incompetent history, bad geology, or fictitious palaeontology, and fail to see what is really going on in them. Ancient authors (such as those alive at the time of Christ) were well aware of something we moderns have come to pride ourselves on knowing: that texts can be made to mean more or less whatever it is you want them to mean. Therefore, for ancient readers, even more than the question “What does the text say?” the question was: “How do you read it?” Or “What is your interpretation of it?” And that meant “Who is your Rabbi? Through *whose eyes* do you read this text?”

Let us remember something about the texts of Scripture at the time of Christ: the scrolls were in Hebrew, which, even by that time, was not precisely a “dead” language, but a language reserved for a small educated class. The spoken language in that part of the world was Aramaic—the ordinary day-to-day language of the former Babylonian empire.

Hebrew was the language of a caste, much like Church Latin was the language used by the educated in Mediaeval Europe. Furthermore, Hebrew was a language whose written signs contained only consonants, no vowels. The dots and squiggles you will find in modern Hebrew Bibles, which indicate the vowels to be supplied, were fixed considerably after the Biblical period. Any First-Century person picking up a text to read aloud was going to have to provide the appropriate vowels in order to breathe life and meaning into the text.

Think of what it would mean for the English language to have no vowels. You are asked to stand up and read a text that includes, as a single word, the letters “l” and “v,” but no vowels. You might supply them so as to say “love,” but you could also supply the vowels which give “alive,” “olive,” “lava,” “levee,” and I’m sure that Scrabble experts could go on. In fact, you would probably draw on a mixture of what you had heard before, when you’d listened to this passage read by one of your teach-

ers, and what common sense dictated was the most likely and logical reading.

Please notice, however, that the *more skilled* you became at reading in this way, the more interesting and *varied* might be the vowels you supplied, and the meanings you therefore produced. In short, the exercise is closer to playing music than to what we regard as reading a text. Musicians create a unique performance each time they play together, breathing life, energy and style into the silent notes which adorn their scores.

So reading a text in this way implied taking a great deal of responsibility for the meaning that emerged from it. And reading a text considered to be given by God implied an even greater responsibility for—and indeed, a greater sense of awe at—the multiplicity of meanings which might issue forth from the different combinations of consonants on the page in front of you.

All of this meant there were people at the time who were very familiar with what we now call “hermeneutics”—the formal discussion of how you interpret things. And they were well aware that it was not “what the text says”, but “through whose eyes you read the text” that was going to give you your interpretation. And to the question “Through whose eyes do you read the text?”, two quite different answers emerged from the remnants of the Jewish world after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The answer given by the rabbis who regrouped after the Judean war was to double down on the claim that the books of the Law—Torah—were written by Moses. Far more than a fundamentalist claim about historical authorship, this meant “We read these texts through the eyes of Moshe Rabénu (Moses our Rabbi)”.

Of course, the texts of Torah themselves are peppered with reading instructions—the equivalents of words in an orchestral score saying *rallentando* or *allegro, ma non troppo*, giving you advice as to how to play the notes below. For instance, in the book of Numbers, Chapter 12, there is a row concerning who gets to speak for God—in other words, a row about interpretation. Aaron and Miriam respectively say: “Why shouldn’t we get to speak for God as well as Moses?” Good point; after all, Aaron is both High Priest and Moses’ elder brother. Miriam is pretty important as well; it was she who rescued Moses when he was a baby.

But God makes it clear that only Moses is authorised to speak for God. Moses is presented as meek: “more so than anyone on the face of the Earth”, whereas the other two are presented as jealous. So, meek Moses is the one through whose mouth God speaks—and through whose eyes, therefore, it is proper to read God’s word. This is emphasised when God punishes Aaron and Miriam, in her case with a week’s worth of leprosy and the exclusion from the camp which that implied.

So, how should a good rabbinical reader read Torah? Well, through the eyes of meek Moses, entirely without the jealous self-importance of his brother or sister. The other main answer to the question “Through whose eyes do you read the texts of Scripture?” is the answer given not by Rabbinical Judaism, but by its slightly older contemporary, Universalising (or New Testament) Judaism, which we now call Christianity. That answer, worked out in the years between Jesus’ death and the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD was “We read the Scriptures through the eyes of Jesus our Rabbi”. Those who gave this answer were well aware that they were answering a quite specific and complex question of interpretation. They claimed that Jesus was a dead and living Rabbi. In other words, a *living interpretative principle* opened their eyes to read their texts.

Just to show that this principle is not something unique to Luke, whose text we will be reading, there are some striking examples of it in Matthew’s Gospel. For instance, in Matthew 23, Jesus gives a highly polemical discourse concerning teaching and interpretation. At its centre is the notion that his disciples have only one rabbi, only one Father and only one teacher, the Christ, in whose presence they are all on the same level. That is to say, it is through Jesus’ eyes that they are to read the texts of Scripture. This presence of the one Master acts as a way of teaching his disciples—us—how to relativise and not be overawed by all the fakery and contortions of religious leaders. It is a permanently *contemporary* presence—as indeed it needs to be, since the fakery and contortions of religious leadership did not suddenly come to an end when the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed, nor are they limited to an ethnic group, ideological party or religious denomination.

For it to be even clearer that this is a deliberate instruction about how to read, then how about this passage from Matthew, which you have all heard before?

At that time Jesus said: “I thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11: 25-30)

This is some pretty technical material! Whereas Moses was described by God as “my servant”, here we have a Son. The Son is the proper interpreter of the Father, and also the one who freely drives that interpretation—the *active interpreting force*. The “yoke” was a standard way of referring to the Law of Moses, and where the book of Numbers had used the rare word “meek” to describe Moses, here Jesus describes himself with the same word. In other words, Matthew is giving a reading instruction: you want to know what “meek Moses” really looks like? This person, Jesus, is what “meek Moses” really looks like. The crucified and risen Rabbi is going to teach you to live God’s law in quite a different way. It is not a question of “Moses bad, Jesus good”, but rather “You know what Moses was about? Well, the servant was a stepping-stone on the way to the Son, who’s going to open things up for you and make you free. This is what meek Moses was really about”.

So that is Matthew’s answer to the question “Through whose eyes do you read the texts of Scripture?” Now, let’s finally turn to Luke’s answer to the same question. He’s going to point out for us the normal experience of having Scripture read to you through the eyes of his Rabbi, *our* Rabbi, who is going to be interpreting things for us. He does so through a narrative—something which is often treated as just a slightly

weird miracle story, but which I hope you will see is something even more wonderful than that.

Reading Luke 24:13-35

Our narrative begins on the day of the Resurrection.¹ Two of Jesus' followers are going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. If you've been to the Holy Land, you know there are at least four candidates for a place called Emmaus! In fact, no one has any idea which, if any, of these candidates is the real deal. Regardless, an Emmaus is referred to in the book of the Maccabees (though with a different spelling). It is at least possible that Luke was deliberately using a vague name—somewhere that was not Jerusalem but was reasonably close to Jerusalem (see the comments on pp. 1560-63 of J. Fitzmyer's commentary on Luke's Gospel in the Anchor Bible series).

Luke was no fool and was quite capable of an accurate geographical description. See, for instance, his descriptions of Malta and Italy in the Acts of the Apostles. But he was also capable of what I might call "theological geography"—such as when he posits a precipice in Nazareth from which Jesus avoided being thrown (Luke 4:29-30). There, he shows how Jesus' rejection in his hometown at the beginning of his ministry foreshadowed both the casting of the scapegoat into the wilderness, typically from a precipice, and Jesus' crucifixion at the end of his ministry.

The fundamental importance of "Emmaus" as a piece of "theological geography" is that, by being "not anywhere of any importance in itself"—unlike Jerusalem, which is a very definite place charged with enormous significance—, Emmaus can, in principle, be anywhere at all. After all, if it had been easy to tie down Emmaus to being a particular place of importance in itself, what do you think would have happened to it as a result of this story? A sanctuary, a shrine, a "Now you see him, now you don't" theme park of the sort we Catholics love. The mysterious encounter on the road and in the home of Cleopas and his colleague would have become the story of a particular miracle, tied to a specific place, rather than a paradigm of the sort of encounter that can,

¹ See the appendix.

and does, happen “wherever”. We are talking here about the parameters of a transferable event. And as we will see, Luke is really very subtle in how he sets this up.

So, our two disciples are walking along, talking about everything that had happened. The English translation says: “While they were talking and discussing together (...)” The Greek word used here is “*homilein*”. Think of our word “homily”. In fact, the word merely means “to talk,” just as the Latin *sermo* just means “word,” so a “sermon” is a lot of words. Our two disciples are walking along and talking together: “*homilating*”.

While they are doing so: “Jesus himself drew near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognising him”. Now, here’s something significant. A third party draws up, someone they do not recognise, and says to them: “What is this conversation which you are holding with each other (οὓς ἀντιβάλλετε πρὸς ἀλλήλους) as you walk?” Lest you think this third party has lighted upon a quiet afternoon chat between two English vicars strolling gently along by a river bank, I’ve included the Greek word *antibállete*, from which we get our word “antiballistic”. It means “to toss back and forth in a somewhat violent manner”. Rather than a quiet discussion, what is going on here is a row—a considerably charged exchange of multiple viewpoints. (You know the old joke: “Two Jews, five opinions”). This is going to be very important, since these same two people who are unable to agree on anything at this point will, by the end of our narrative, be singing from the same hymn sheet, talking together with one voice. But for the moment, they can’t get their story straight—they’re tossing it back and forth, trying to make sense of it. “And they stood still, looking sad (σκυθρωποί)”.

The word that is translated as “looking sad” is the word *skuthropoi*, which means something like “with darkened mien” or “with downcast visage”. It’s not a common word in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures), but it does appear in one rather special place in the story of Joseph (Genesis 40:7-8). In that story, there is a moment where Joseph is in prison in Egypt, and among his fellow prisoners are Pharaoh’s butler and Pharaoh’s baker. These two have had dreams, and they can’t work out what the dreams mean. They don’t know how to interpret them. Joseph comes upon them and asks: “Why are your faces

downcast (*skuthropa*) today?” They tell him they have had dreams, but have no one to interpret them, and Joseph says: “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me.”

Do you see what Luke is doing? He’s putting a big red flashing light in his text: “Attention! Attention! Story about interpretation coming up!” In fact, Luke assumes that most of his hearers have access to—and memory of—the Septuagint, and he makes lots of references to it. He quite closely imitates its style in places, giving a more “artsy” feel to his writing than the style of Mark, Matthew, or John, where hints of original Semitic words (from Hebrew and Aramaic) frequently show through the rather more stilted Greek of the text. So when Luke drops a rare word from the Septuagint into his recounting of a New Testament story, we’re supposed to notice.

And indeed, what was happening in the Joseph story? Two people are discussing things that they are unable to interpret, and a third person arrives and offers the definitive interpretation from God. Exactly what is going to happen on the road to Emmaus! We are about to get an interpretation: “Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him”. Before we look at Cleopas’ answer, I’d like to ask: what was the other one, Cleopas’ companion, called? There have been lots of guesses over the years. My hunch is that, just as I suggested that the place “Emmaus” is deliberately “wherever”, so I think Luke is deliberately leaving the name blank. Thus, we, the listener, can insert the person who is known in our liturgical books as “N”—“we pray for N, our Pope, N our Bishop, and N and N your faithful departed”—where “N” stands for the Latin “Nomen” or “name to be supplied”. In other words, you are supposed to supply your name: it could be you, it could be me.

And look at how cleverly Luke is setting this up: we have two people, a named individual, Cleopas—one of the Apostolic “B-team” who was a genuine eyewitness to the Gospel events and to whom there are other references in the New Testament—and “N,” meaning one of us, who is not necessarily an eyewitness to the events. You or I, who, through a chain of named individuals, have a real historical link to people who were eyewitnesses to Jesus’ historical life. This sets the frame for the interpretative experience that these two are about to undergo as something that is indeed structured, but is not a question of authority.

This incident, the definitive account of Christian interpretation, happens entirely outside the gaze of the Apostolic “A-team”—Peter and the other ten apostles who are left after Judas hangs himself.

You see, some people might have thought that Christianity involved a series of miraculous occurrences to a group of folk in authority—the A-team—who are the ones who “really know”, and the interpretation is the one which they pass down, as it were, from “on high”. But no, says Luke! The definitive interpretative experience is something which happens to N, to *any-body*, in company with a historical link to the real historical events concerning Jesus. It is always the crucified and risen Rabbi who is the authority. Cleopas and N go back to Jerusalem at the end of the story, and they compare what the A-team is saying with what happened to them. That Luke gives us this text is the sign that the A-team confirmed their story, and that *confirmation* is the shape of the A-team’s authority.

Do you see how artfully Luke is setting out the narrative structure of what appears in Matthew as “You have one Rabbi and you are all brethren?” (Matthew 23:8). Luke takes very seriously the named historical link and the difference between the Apostolic A-team and the Apostolic B-team. He’s affirming a “Church structure” to the matter of interpretation, that it is not a chaotic free-for-all. He is, however, making it clear that the central interpretative experience is not a matter of Church authority; it happens to anyone, anywhere, at the hand of the crucified and risen Rabbi.

Curiously, some Nineteenth Century German Protestant theologians noticed this about St Luke and accused him of what they regarded as a grave heresy, which they called *Fruhkatholizismus*, or “Early Catholicism”. They wanted to interpret ecclesiastical order as a later invention, foisted upon a pure Gospel. Still, they noticed that Luke didn’t help them make their point, since he was quite keen on showing how structures work and are intrinsic to spreading the Gospel. For Luke, the historical link is important. But our experience of Jesus does not depend on—and is not received from—the glowering eye of ecclesiastical authority. If we are undergoing the real thing, we’ll know it; it will become evident through us as we share it with others in the Church, and ecclesiastical authority will confirm it later.

At last, we can allow Cleopas to answer the question the unrecognisable Jesus has put to him. He says: “Are you the only visitor (παροῖ κείζ) to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” Now that little word *paroikeis*, translated here as “visitor,” is important. It sounds like our English word “parochial” or “parish”. But whereas our word “parochial” is a way for us to say “very domestic”, the word *paroikos* actually meant something not quite domestic. Rather than a “visitor”, it meant a “resident alien”, someone who is *living* here, but not *from* here—who doesn’t entirely belong. The sort of person who in the US would be the bearer of a Green Card but would not be a citizen, and whose patriotism and reliability as a neighbour would thus be held in suspicion by those who keep watch on such things.

This term “resident alien”, which our older translations render by the splendid word “sojourner”, is a very important word in the Bible. Almost everyone who matters in the Books of Moses is a sojourner. Abraham was a sojourner, Isaac was a sojourner, Jacob was a sojourner, Joseph was a sojourner, the people of Israel were sojourners in Egypt. People with “no abiding city” as the Epistle to the Hebrews tells it. People who are always on the road to somewhere else, and never fully domesticated. The experience of being someone “who lives here, but is not from here” is crucial to the whole Hebrew story.

So, what has Cleopas noticed when he says to the unrecognizable third party: “Are you the only resident alien in Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that have happened there in these days”? He’s heard an accent! A tone of voice. Something about the third party who was speaking has given away that he’s “not from here”, is “not one of us”. And people who are not one of us are the sort of people who wouldn’t get it. If you’re a recently arrived resident alien in the US, you are unlikely to “get” late-night comedians’ jokes immediately. A recent immigrant to Great Britain will need someone to explain to them what “Private Eye” is all about, because it relies on a series of “in” jokes in order to let you know what is going on.

Think about what this means for the relationship between the unrecognisable third party, and Cleopas and N—that is to say, yourself. Your first reaction is going to be to discount this half-outsider’s point

of view: “We’re having this discussion”, you might say: “and we, who are insiders, don’t really get it, so how much less is an outsider like you likely to get it!” Now the unrecognisable third party comes back to them about “the things that have happened” and asks: “What things?” Is this Jesus being cutesy? Playing hard to get? As though this was a vaudeville scene, and Jesus is tipping the wink to the audience that he’s going to catch the disciples out being dumb and rub their noses in it?

Here’s another possibility: The third party from “somewhere else” is from such a different psychic and emotional place that listening to these guys jabbering on was like listening to foam burbling away on the surface of the sea. He is a big fish from such a deep part of the ocean that there is scarcely anything in common between his reality and theirs. His knowledge of what had happened—the whole parameters of his story, the place from which he lived it—were so totally different from anything that these guys were picking up on that he simply couldn’t make sense of what they were talking about.

While I think this latter interpretation is more plausible than the “Jesus playing cutesy” reading, what seems most important here is our third party’s awareness that these guys are never going to understand what was going on except through their own attempt to tell the story. If they just shut him off and say: “You wouldn’t get it”, they’ll never learn to piece the story together and sense the holes in their own version. So the definitive interpreter, with the voice from somewhere else, has first to *induct* the “insiders” into telling their own story rather than squabbling with each other. It is through their own failed telling that they are going to be given an interpretation that actually makes sense.

Luke then shows Cleopas and N setting out, very briefly, some five different angles on the Jesus story, none of which fit together in any way which makes sense. They are, we might say, fragments of a story without a hermeneutical key to bring them together. Our duo starts by referring to Jesus of Nazareth, a person within their very recent historical memory. They describe him as a prophet (already an act of interpretation), and one who was “mighty in word and deed before God and all the people”. In other words, someone who had made a public impact by what he had said and done and who was known all over the place. The chief priests and rulers—the local political and religious

establishment—obviously had their own interpretation of what Jesus was about. They delivered him up—that is, handed him over to the occupying forces of Roman law and order—and crucified him—a particularly nasty form of public execution by which the Romans shamed their victims.

So here we have things that don't fit together: this Jesus was a prophet, but the local political and religious authorities, who might be expected to have a vested interest in such a firm representative of their own way of seeing things as opposed to that of the Romans, had done him in. Something is wrong with this picture.

They go on to offer another strand of interpretation: they had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel. In other words, they interpreted his words and actions within a series of archaic hopes for fulfilment. Jesus had been, as they understood it, in the business of bringing back certain things: the real Temple, the Kingdom of Israel with its institutions. The twelve tribes would be restored; that was, after all, why he had named twelve disciples as his apostles. The New Israel was being brought in: “redeemed”, vindicated. Nevertheless, in this, the disciples had been disappointed—it didn't seem to have happened.

Further strands of interpretation emerge across their following remarks: “All this is very recent, though now it is the third day since it has happened (which itself has curious scriptural resonances, about which we are not sure). Some women are saying they had been at the tomb early in the morning but could find no corpse there. They returned saying they had seen a vision of angels—though we must remember they are women, and so only second-class witnesses—and that the angels said Jesus was alive, which seems a pretty steep claim. So a few of our male companions, being more reliable witnesses, went off to the tomb and, although they didn't see the angels or Jesus, they confirmed what the women had said: there was no corpse in the tomb”.

We have here a mishmash of public persons, historical incidents, current events, physical impossibilities, and interpretations which don't make sense. There is no overarching narrative that can put all this together, hence their tossing the material back and forth at each other anti-ballistically.

And now, the third party again addresses them: “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” First, he upbraids them in classic Biblical style. Then he announces to them what he is going to do: he is going to propose a unitary interpretation of all the things they had been talking about, showing not only how they hung together, but how they *had* to hang together, *had always* hung together. An interpretation at once unifying and self-evident. In short, he is saying: “All the things you’ve described, and don’t know how to put together, all make perfect sense as part of a deliberate project or trajectory. They *have* to be this way”.

Now, please notice something curious here: this unrecognisable third party starts giving his interpretation by himself referring to a third person, the Christ, whom he refers to with the pronoun “he”. So for the moment, we have a “he” talking about another “he”. “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them (διερμήνευσεν αὐτοῖς) in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” The Greek word which I’ve put in brackets here is translated as “interpret”. From its sound—“*diherméneusen*”—you can guess it is the word behind our modern word: “hermeneutics”, the grand word we have for “the science of interpretation”. So this third party interpreted—or “*hermeneuted*”—for Cleopas and his companion. In other words (and this is what this passage is all about), he became their *living hermeneutical principle*.

Now, sometimes one hears preachers or commentators raging against Cleopas and his companion at this stage. “Here was the Lord giving the definitive interpretation of the whole of Hebrew Scripture!” They’ll ask: “Why didn’t they get out their Palm pilots, or their iTablets, or their iPapyri, and either record Him or at least jot down His interpretation! Just think of the trees we’d have saved if we weren’t condemned to endless tomes of commentary, all rendered redundant if only these jokers had written down Our Lord’s very own commentary!”

Those preachers are entirely missing the point. If Cleopas and his companion had done just that, we would have been left with... yet more text to interpret, for there is no end to interpreting texts. What Luke wants to show us is the shape of the living interpretative presence among us, in light of which all texts become secondary.

Our unrecognisable third party continues through the entire corpus of the Scriptures, starting with Moses and all the prophets. Please notice that this is not necessarily a chronological description; it's a global description. We are not even certain which books would have been included in the phrase "all the Scriptures". While the list of books of the Law and the Prophets had become stable by this time, the other section (known as the "writings") was in flux. The canon of the Hebrew Scriptures was not yet fixed. So our third party may well have referenced books which "didn't make it" into the final cut and haven't reached us. What is important is that this "global package" was not only an amalgam of what we would consider "religious" books and history; they were the entire political and cultural history of the Hebrews as well, the whole story within which Cleopas and N had grown up and which had given them to be who they were. The stranger was telling them the very tale of themselves from an entirely new angle that they had never heard before.

Imagine someone telling a couple of Americans the story of their country from, say, the perspective of some native inhabitants of the land at the time the Pilgrims arrived. The real story behind the feast of Thanksgiving, what it looked like to have their food supply destroyed by these white folk who turned up, what was really going on with the declaration of Independence, the economics of African slavery, the Civil War, the decimation of the Native Americans, the Great Depression, and so on. We can all imagine this history told from different perspectives—and the various reactions to those perspectives.

But here, the story being told is not designed to make Cleopas and N feel bad about being who they are. It is an integral story, not just a collection of disjointed bits of accusatory minority perspective. It's a whole, and it makes sense to its listeners. Later on, they describe their experience of undergoing this act of interpretation by wondering: "Did not our hearts burn within us?" They knew that they were being told the truth, and hearing it was turning who they thought they were, and how they thought they belonged, upside down. They were being *re-narrated into being*.

Now remember, we still have here, in this third party, a "bloke talking about a bloke". Even though Luke makes it quite clear that this

is Jesus talking about Himself, for the moment, Cleopas and N don't get that at all. The word "I" has not yet been said. It continues to be a third-person narrative, which is hugely shaking up the two first-person listeners (the real protagonists, in their own minds) as they hear it: "So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained Him, saying: "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent."

As I mentioned, the village could be anywhere—its real geography is unimportant. But now we get a nice little Lucan Yahwistic hint: the third party appears to be going further, but they constrain Him. I say this is a Yahwistic hint, since one of the things that YHWH often does in the Hebrew Scripture is pass by, being grasped at as he vanishes. YHWH does that to Moses, and Moses only gets to see God's "hind parts". (I love that translation!) The same thing is referred to in Mark, when Jesus walks by the fishermen on the water and they have to call out to Him to get back into the boat. So here we have Luke's hint: you're about to get a Yahwistic theophany, an appearance of God. YHWH is about to make an appearance.

Let's sum up, then: you have two people, Cleopas and N, who, as far as they were concerned, were the protagonists of their own discussion. A third person—who, being an outsider, can't really "get it"—has come up to them and asked what's going on. They tell Him as best they can, and He turns the whole thing around for them, telling them their own story such that they begin to find themselves "inside it" in quite a different way. He shows them that there's a project and a protagonism at work here, which is different from what they had imagined, and in the presence of which they are not the protagonists they thought they were.

Now they've "constrained" Him, invited Him in, still thinking of themselves as the host and of him as their guest. And guess what? Now, *even that* element of their protagonism is inverted: "When He was at table with them, He took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them". Suddenly, they are the guests, and he is the host.

And not only the host, but one who has performed certain signs which Cleopas (and quite possibly N) would have associated with Jesus: "And their eyes were opened (ιηνοίχθησαν) and they recognized Him; and He vanished out of their sight (αὐτὸς ἄφαντος ἐγένετο)." This

sounds like three consecutive moments—one of amazement (“Wow!”), one of recognition (“Oh, look, it’s him!”), then finally, with a wave: “Yes, it’s me, byeee!”

However, it’s all one flow in Greek: three dimensions of one movement. “Their eyes were opened”—this is something that someone does *to* them; the verb is passive, as earlier when Luke wrote that “their eyes were kept from recognising him.” They recognise him, and then—well, our word “vanished” is too active. It suggests a movement away from them. What it literally says is: “He unappearing became.” This is not even something like “Now you see me, now you don’t”. This is a Yahwistic theophany, where there is a buildup to something, and then, only in immediate retrospect—“as it passes by”—do you realise what you have experienced, because YHWH can’t be grasped.

This Yahwistic theophany is not only visual; it also works at the aural, or interpretative level. Cleopas and N are beginning to realise that, all along, it hadn’t been a “he” who was talking to them, but I AM. I AM is who YHWH is. In other words, they hadn’t been hearing an outsider explain a narrative thread to them from the outside; they had found themselves summoned into the narrative that the *actual* protagonist of the events had been recounting, and the recounting was part of the event.

I AM had been interpreting I AM’s self to them all along. They thought themselves the protagonists of the story, when in fact they had been its receivers. They had been being turned into different sorts of “I”. And as they find themselves given a new “I” by “I AM,” they discover that I AM is no longer a third party outside them, but the very source, *within them*, of who they are and what they are becoming: “They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’”

No wonder their hearts burned within them! They found themselves at last being given an account of what happened that includes them in it—in fact, writes them into being in an entirely new way, with a truth that does not come from them and about which they need not be in rivalry. Where earlier they had been “antiballeting” about, now they are speaking together with one voice, as recipients of an interpretative theophany:

And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said: “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”

Despite the evening hour, they get up and hurry back to Jerusalem. There, they find the A team, the eleven, along with a group of Cleopas’ mates on the B team. It is these who tell them: “The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon.” This, we know from other passages of the New Testament, was the first *Kerygma*—the formal, authoritative announcement of the Gospel: “The Lord has risen and he has appeared to Cephas”. This, the A team announces.

Then, the B team shares: “Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.” In other words, what they have experienced is entirely separate from, but is confirmed by, the A team’s experience. Luke has given us the framework for the ordinary experience of what it is to be a Christian: to have your text, your story—and thus your very self—interrupted by and reinterpreted for you by the crucified and risen Lord.

Dead Man Talking

Earlier, I pointed out that one of the first things Cleopas gleaned about the third party was his tone of voice, by which Cleopas concluded that he was “not one of us” and therefore wouldn’t “get” it.

Of course, what this means for any of us is that our own hearing is not properly matched to the voice of the Lord. Insofar as he speaks to us, he is going to interrupt our self-importance and our sense that we are the ones who “get” it.

Now I’d like to bring out something even odder about the tone of voice of the unrecognisable third party. Cleopas and his mate, N, have been walking along, listening to the voice of a *dead man*.

Think about that! It doesn’t sound so odd, because, well, we’ve heard the story: we know that Jesus was killed on Good Friday, but also

that he rose on Easter morning, so he was no longer a dead man. But that's wrong.

Think about it this way. Let us suppose Jesus had been 33 on Good Friday, and that his 34th birthday would have been on Holy Saturday. However, He's killed on Good Friday, and doesn't make it to his 34th Birthday.

How old is He then on Easter Day? Well, He's not 33, because He's dead. And He's not 34, because He didn't get there. He really did die on Good Friday. It was not that he suffered from a bad dose of the flu, but he then picked up again on Sunday. His life on this Earth ended on a specific date, as the life of each one of us surely will. The Risen Lord is not the Lord recovered from a nasty bout of "death". The Risen Lord is this dead man, who lived his 33 years and was killed; his whole life-and-death is now held in *life* such that death doesn't close him down.

This is a challenging thing for us to grasp, because ordinarily being alive and being dead are two equal and opposite realities: you can only be one of them at any given time. We can imagine being talked to by someone who had a bad couple of days and then got better, or even someone who had been imprisoned for several years and was then released. We can't easily understand the sort of "being alive" that is able to assume within it, take inside itself: "a being dead" without being in rivalry with death. Nevertheless, that is what Luke is showing us in his theophanic account: Cleopas and N were not being talked to by someone who had "gotten better"; they were being talked to by a dead man.

I hope you can see that this is ludicrous. None of us has ever heard a dead man speak. Indeed, what is the point of having dead men if they can talk? Why would witnesses be "disappeared" by Mafia types if it didn't shut them up definitively? The whole point of making dead men dead is that dead men tell no tales. And yet what we have here is a dead man telling a tale. This is very bizarre. The nearest parallel we have is ghosts, the most traditional form of dead men telling stories, and yet the tales they tell are somewhat tedious. Ghosts appear, rattle chains, go "Woooooo!", and frighten people. When they stop the whole rattling and wailing bit, they say things like "The bastards got to me! Until you take vengeance on them, I won't be able to rest. So give me closure, kill the bastards!"

Such ghost stories are, classically, tales of revenge. Hamlet's father's ghost is the paradigm. The ghosts come back seeking retribution, and their story is completely comprehensible on the same level as the story of the survivors with whom they are in rivalry. Indeed, that is why we think of ghosts as essentially projections, dimensions of dreams, fantasies, bad memories or psychological quirks. It's why Herod, having killed John the Baptist unjustly, thinks Jesus is the ghost of John the Baptist come back to haunt him.

However, here (as elsewhere in the Gospels) the presence of the crucified and risen dead-man-talking is carefully distinguished from that of a ghost. In the first instance, there is no request for vengeance. Indeed, the presence does not provide the tail end of a story that all involved already know about. On the contrary, the one who is speaking is opening up a whole new story as its protagonist, as someone who was doing something deliberately all along, who was purposefully opening new things up for lots of people, not someone reacting to nasty things which other people did to him. In fact, he is *seriously unbothered* by what the other people did to him. The whole of his interpretation is entirely removed from any type of tit-for-tat.

Not only, then, is it a dead man talking, but a dead man talking without any rancour. It is someone who has been seriously victimised, as Cleopas and N know very well—someone put to death cruelly by a violent conspiracy between religious and political forces. Usually, when victims interpret things, it's to complain about how badly they've been treated. However, this is a victim telling the story, but it's not a victimary story at all. When the unrecognised third party says: "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory", there is no hint of a victimary bleat. Quite the contrary: the dead man, as the story's protagonist manifests everything up to and including his own death as a deliberate project into which he purposefully entered. So he is not complaining. Yes, it is a victim speaking—but without rancour. A dead man talking—but without desire for revenge.

These are the final two elements I want to bring out of our speaker's tone of voice. They are further elements of what it feels like to have our texts interpreted to us through the eyes of our dead-and-risen Rabbi. They enable us to share the disciples' sense, quoted elsewhere

in the Gospels, that “It is the Lord!”—meaning not only that it is Jesus who is speaking, but that Jesus is in fact YHWH. For there is only one source of protagonism that is not on the same level as death, whose life and aliveness has nothing to do with death—and that is God. So a dead man communicating while being dead and yet not being bound by death is an act of communication that only YHWH could conceivably make. There is only one source of protagonism that is not in rivalry with anything that is, and therefore cannot tell a victimary story, only a deliberate story of bringing into being out of nothing. And that, again, is the Creator: YHWH.

So what we have here in Luke’s text is the ordinary shape of YHWH’s protagonism becoming a human act of communication and a living interpretative principle. This is Luke’s answer to the question: “Through whose eyes do you read the Scriptures?”

The Structure of Eucharist

I’d be remiss if I let you off of this chapter thinking: “What a nice intellectual exercise Luke set up for his listeners!” This is not a matter of clever people sitting around and having a discussion about texts. Luke structures his narrative so that it’s not merely a walk, a discussion, and an act of interpretation. It is also an inverted act of hospitality. There is a shared meal in which the guest becomes the host, and the protagonist gives himself to be known by a striking mode of presence associated with the breaking of bread. What you have, in short, is the structure of Eucharist, what we in Catholic circles usually call “the Mass” and what Protestants often refer to simply as “The Lord’s Supper”.

All the elements are there: the walking together, the texts, the *homilating*, the interpretation, the breaking of bread, and the recognition of I AM who has deliberately given himself in sacrifice for you—what we call the Real Presence. This is done not only as an act of interpretation, but as a meal. It means that part of the structure of Eucharist is the memory of a third person “out there”, coming in to disturb you. If you are two people talking together amongst yourselves, it’s easy to avoid a third person interrupting you. But what we call the Mass

is always a third person interrupting us through a particular mode of interpretative presence.

So Luke doesn't only give a technical answer to the question "Through whose eyes do we read Scripture?" He gives a liturgical answer: "We read the Scriptures eucharistically, through the eyes of Jesus our Rabbi". In other words, we read through the eyes of one who is present amongst us and who causes us to undergo a complete change of belonging to our world. We find him interrupting us, speaking to us from the periphery, from just offscreen of what we can understand, including us in a story which is *his* story, in which he is the protagonist. What we gradually find is that his story also makes much better sense of our own story. We find ourselves taken somewhere else, drawn into a bigger framework. And this requires something outside us.

This is not just text. It's text and a meal with a third person. Do you see what Luke has done here? How something appearing to be a miracle story is, in fact, a very sophisticated piece of narrative, setting forth what it is like to have the reader of our texts in our midst? This is the basic Christian experience. To this mode of presence, this dynamic of communication, we will be returning many times.