

The Emmaus story is Lukan, and it typifies that literary skill for which this year's Evangelist is famed in the New Testament. It has been given extensive treatment *in Luke's study*. There is an important thought here; Jesus was a storyteller of genius, but his mode for storytelling was the mode of the stand-up orator, fast on his feet, and good at spontaneous fielding of hecklers and barrackers. The Jewish parable is a one-liner.

But Luke is a Greek and not a Jew. Luke has worked hard on the material in the tradition. No-one should doubt that the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son are figures from the teaching of Jesus and from the mind of Jesus; but the stories in which Luke framed them are novelist's work, not the words of a market-place story-teller. For *that* tone, we must go to the pithy simplicity of the three-line parables in Mark and Matthew. Still, we could sit here and trace every element in Luke's literary short stories back to the real Jesus. He was inspired when he did what he did by devotion and truthful fidelity to his great source.

So with the story of Emmaus. It has found a mention in Mark's footnoted ending, so we know it was of wide currency in the early Church. It takes many of the factors we have already seen in the Resurrection stories, and sets them in a consistent narrative of great skill. Here are the classic features of a professionally-crafted story: a secret identity, known to us from the beginning, but concealed from the characters in the story; high emotion (to which our translators have done scant justice) and a revolution in the relationships, ending in a dramatic disclosure which turns the whole story on its head. This in turn leads in to the theme of re-evaluation: the retraced steps back to Jerusalem, the reassembling of the disciples, and the re-telling of the stories, which is the way in which the Christian Gospel came to be.

If we are to take one element for ourselves from the great wealth that is here, perhaps it should be the retelling of stories. We pass judgment on our lives and our relationships all the time. We look back across the passage of years, and we consign so much to the dustbin: people in whose lives we were once important, things we used to do, talents we never developed, gifts we left beside the road, experiences to which we never gave our true attention at the time. We cut out whole tracts of suffering, too painful to revisit. We darken certain deep places of our journey, which remain veiled from the attention of others and unvisited by ourselves.

The Gospel of Easter is nothing else but the forced re-reading of agony, condemnation, and death in a light so unexpected that it almost takes the breath of those dragged into it. At first it is paralysing; then slowly we regain the use of our limbs, and *we tell our story again*. When Cleopas and his friend give reasons for their grief and contention, they practically recite the heart of the Apostle's Creed. The same story, retold, will become the salvation-story of the human family.

So let us retell the story of our life, by the new light of Easter, which the Church has faithfully kept burning down the years. We shan't find that we need to reconsider, or to correct details here and there. We shall find ourselves paralysed by the total revolution of our judgment, and then - when we have, as it were, regained our sight - we shall find our way rapidly back to the city of celebration, and the remaking of the Church of Christ.