

Homeward Bound

HOLY WEEK - STUDY 6

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Deciding to Head Home - Study 6

You may be familiar with the old folk song Poor Wayfaring Stranger that has been made famous by many artists over the years. The lyrics are poignant

I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger
Travelling through this world of woe
Yet there's no sickness, toil nor danger
In that bright land to which I go
I'm going there to see my mother
I'm going there no more to roam
I'm only going over Jordan
I'm only going over home

We arrive then at the home we've longed for and journey long to reach. How do we get inside?

Gaining entry to a building is a comparatively simple matter. One enters through the door by either opening it ourselves or requesting entry. To open it we need to unlock it, using either a key or a combination. If we have the key then it's assumed that we have a right to come in. If we are without the means of entering ourselves then we must call out, knock or ring the doorbell and wait until our request is responded to. If the occupant decides that we are to be admitted then we may enter.

Holy Week, the annual celebration of the event of the death and resurrection of Jesus, is a celebration of the opening to us of home's front door. Home is where God is and Jesus is the front door through which we must enter.

Jesus is recorded in John's gospel as describing himself as the door in the wonderful metaphor of the sheep,

the shepherd and the sheepfold. The sheepfold is home for the sheep, the place where they are safe, protected and able to rest. Jesus is the shepherd but also the door through whom the sheep pass into the sheepfold.

The recorded events of Good Friday speak volumes of the significance of the death of Jesus as the opening home's door.

Matthew (27.51) recorded that at the moment of the Lord's death the curtain in the temple was torn in two. This was of course the thick curtain-wall that separated the holy of holies where God was believed to dwell on earth, from the rest of the temple. Ordinary folk couldn't go behind the curtain into the holiest place but the rending of the curtain was a symbolic statement that the separation between God and humanity, heaven and earth, was abolished. This opening of the door was the work of Jesus of the cross.

What had specifically kept people from entering through the door of heaven/home was the fact of sin and death. Paul in the letter to the Romans focussed on this in detail explaining that humanity was once in God's presence and in a relationship of peace and innocence until wilful disobedience caused the door to close. People had lived with a hope that one day they could come to the door, knock and be admitted. Paul links the event of the first act of wilful disobedience and the life of perfect obedience in the juxtaposition of Adam and Jesus.

What Adam did, Jesus reversed; in the words of the Easter hymn (TIS 386) “all that Adam lost is now restored”. Adam’s sin closed home’s door – Jesus’ perfect life and death unlocked it again.

Paul is quick to point out that home’s front door is not a sensor-controlled automatic model, nor can the door be opened by any amount of human effort and hard work.

The death of Jesus on the cross must be appreciated and appropriated. People have to take that death and somehow wear it as one would put on a garment (Romans 13.14). How does one put on Jesus like a garment? This can only happen through repentance (of sin), acceptance (of forgiveness) and baptism. When this happens then, as Jesus said, John 14.23 “my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

The word in Greek that translates into English as home, means to dwell, to abide, to stay with. Home then is the dwelling together of friends and family and in this case, the person with their God and Saviour Jesus.

Hebrews (10.19-20) – the reading for Good Friday – speaks of the blood of Jesus as the key that gains our entry into God’s presence, our sanctuary home. Our Australian Prayer Book expresses this beautifully in the canticle for Friday morning. “We have complete freedom to go into the most holy place by means of the death of Jesus. He opened for us a new way, a living

way, through the curtain, through his own body”

The death of the Lord on the cross may have unlocked home’s front door and admitted us in to God’s presence, but Jesus would not be there as the door if God had not raised him back to life. Easter day is the icing on the cake so to speak, the celebration of the raising of Jesus and the restoration of the home that was lost.

Many of you will be familiar with the famous painting by the English artist Holman Hunt that pictures the recently-raised Jesus – still wearing the crown of thorns – holding a lantern in the early dawn mirky light and knocking on the door of a cottage. It is a deeply symbolic picture that speaks of Jesus as the light of the world. Importantly, Jesus is taking the initiative and rather than wait for people to come home. In seeking them he has come to the door of the human heart and requested that the door be opened.

Jesus can no more break down the door of our lives than we can push past him to get back home. Jesus is respectful and will not force his love on anyone . . . hence the door in Hunt’s picture has no door handle, forcing Jesus to knock and call. Similarly we gain entry to our heaven-home politely and obediently or not at all.

If and when we open the door of our life to Jesus who asks to be invited in, we are home. So what does this mean for the timing of our arrival home? We don’t have to wait until our body runs its course and we die.

We are at home in this earthly life when we have invited God – Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit – to dwell with us. All the journeying towards home is done, we are where we need to be for peace, purpose and rest.



Welcome.



Opening Prayer. *(Say Together)*

Almighty God
you have conquered death
through your dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ
and opened to us the gate of everlasting life:
grant us by your grace to set our mind on things above,
so that by your continual help
our whole life may be transformed;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
in everlasting glory. Amen.



Reading. *Hebrews 10:16-25*

Ask someone from the group to read the passage or have each member read a verse in turn

Questions for reflection and discussion



- 1 Ponder on the nature of locks and keys. The key must fit the lock exclusively so that for each lock there is one key.

That which locked us out of our home with God was our sin and disobedience and the only key to open this was the willing death of Jesus. Each member of the group is encouraged to make comment.

2. What has been the master key to your faith. Share if there have been any times when this master key doesn't appear to work and why.
- 3 Having read the passage from Luke 24:13-35, consider the importance of -
 - the disciples meeting Jesus as they journeyed towards Emmaeus
 - meeting and walking with Jesus as the beginning of an experience of home . . . "stay with us"
 - the breaking of bread as the opening of their eyes and the joy of the presence of Jesus



Overview of the Studies

Share your thoughts about the value or otherwise of the experience you have had together these past weeks.

What highlights or new insights did you feel you were able to experience?



Closing prayers (*Share your own prayers followed by this prayer*)

Eternal God, the beginning and the end of our journeying;

Guide us by your Word and Spirit so that we may not wander from your way but walk home to you in safety and come to our eternal rest in you.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our journeying companion and guide, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



Refreshments and Fellowship.