

Home Retreat; Saturday 1 July 2023

“unfinished business at Emmaus..& a first look inside the Inland Revenue office..”

- Welcome back; on our last Home Retreat together on 22 April 2023 we opened Caravaggio’s painting “the Supper at Emmaus” in the format of lectio divina..we considered each of the three characters in the painting apart from Jesus himself.  
  
..I suggested the story, like all the best gospel stories..prodigal son/rich young man/Judas..is left open-ended for you to pray ponder imagine & write in your own final chapter..  
“what happens next?” the notes I enclosed took some possibilities a little further..
- Some years ago, a creative-writing tutor came on one of my Art & Spirituality retreats..she suggested an interesting extension, which I offered to each of you 9wks ago.. a Part 2 of the Retreat..  
“you might give the people [you] a short writing exercise .  
..write in the first person from the point of view of the servant/rabbi an interior monologue or commentary, challenging the listeners [you] to truly step inside the story..  
..or  
..if you could choose which of the three men to be, which one would you be, & why&  
..& what would you be thinking?  
  
Food for thought prayer imagination truth to emerge & I wonder if you might share your writings with me, in the hope they will form a fascinating Part 2 to this Retreat when we meet again probably now in late June..in fact this morning..  
..well over 550 of you tuned in 9wks ago & listened to the invitation to share your ponderings, your wisdom & homework in relation to one of two questions I put to you..two of you responded..each beautifully on the day of the Retreat..fresh emails & warm hearts..
- “servant/rabbi  
I share your secret, Lord. While I was washing your feet, the disciples had their eyes fixed upon your face as they listened to you talking. Your feet were dusty from the road & they needed a good scrubbing. I wrapped your first foot in the towel to dry it, & looked up at you. You paused mid-story & looked at me. I left your other foot alone, afraid to remove all doubt, & went to get the food.”  
  
“It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.”  
Our conversation is coming to an end, and I’m not ready for it to be over. By some miracle, even today, I can see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living, just as you say. However, I know that this way of seeing the world will fade back to dust the second you leave us. Your gait, your voice, your wisdom and the way you carry our pain without pandering to it - it’s hard to explain the difference your presence makes to our journey. You take no persuading. We want you to stay and you want to be with us. Our hosts don’t say much, but they prepare the simple table with care.”

"What struck me most was when you said He is calling us to something different, Something beyond..when I look at the picture, His eyes lowered, the mystery Was just there, the characters and all of us being called to the gradual, silent change, That is to become more like Him, sharing in His human and Divine Nature, becoming who He created us to be.....like the caterpillar dying into becoming the butterfly. All the rough edges to be hammered into gold.

Like the beginning of any painting, unfinished, to be perfected , and this cannot be rushed, patience and total Dependence on the Divine Creator.....  
A real letting go.....hoping for the grace to be enabled to let go and surrender, To the presence.

Sometimes the presence hides itself, other times All is well, He is there .

Sometimes I think of a few of the lovely men and women I met and they truly were signposts to God, when you were in their presence it was really Christ who was giving you a glimpse of who He is and your true self is revealed. The paradox was you could not explain this to them, you have to travel on into the mystery yourself.....  
Love makes us see we cannot do it without the gift of God..it seems simply beyond me.

When He seems to withdraw, it seems painful and in that desert I must wait on His return, When He disappeared in that Gospel passage, it reminds me of those hints he gave and when I remember them I think..surrender to that most wonderful presence, The suffering of his absence is part of the mystery, everything passes and He will come to us again in new and fresh ways.."

- ..beautiful ongoing emerging spirituality, as you follow in the footsteps & heartpring of Caravaggio..he just had the gospel story..we have the gospel & his painted lectio divina to ponder pray imagine & explore, thereby finding in it your Christ & your real self..in communion, companions on a journey, the camino of a lifetime..  
..thank you all for being there on 22 April & remaining there..unfinished business..

- ..this morning I would like to share with you Caravaggio's painting "the Call of Matthew"

Caravaggio did his initial lectio on Matthew 9.9

"..as Jesus was walking on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting by the customs house, & he said to him "follow me" ..& he got up & followed him."

..a moment for us to look..to ponder..to pray..to question the painting..

- A painting of two halves..  
 ..vertical divide separation on line of mid mullion on window..to right are two incomers..Jesus & Peter..the custodians of faith..  
 ..they have entered & engaged tax collectors..distracting them from business..  
 [distracting three of the five]  
 ..sense of this being powerful close knit group.."crew" ..small table all clustered round it on top of one another..impromptu..take us as we are..busy money being sorted & relationships between each being counted & sorted?..  
 comfortable informality..under table all legs no modesty.."take us as you find us"..  
 very human..way figure with back to us leans to right to get closer look at finger of invitation opportunity..magneticised by it..on his opposite side left side his sword..fighting implement..his right hand grips stool.."can I really believe in all of this?"..  
 man of some means silks fine sword plumed head dress ..man of action..professional soldier man of world skilled experienced..not man to cross if you can help it...yet still "one of the boys" a jack the lad..  
 ..sitting posture of one on a knife edge..liminal space..edge of group edge of table edges of stool..his sword points in direction of Matthew with handle almost surrendering mode ..

yet one character is in focus in light in fullness of image

[young student soldier..young pretender ?..see & read more in to him than any other character on offer..

..relaxed informal way he leans on Matthew..their connectedness shown in identical nature of sleeves of their respective garments..some colouring pattern the contrast in hands ..boys smaller fresher right hand with fingers drooping as if puzzling uncertain unsure ..almost on edge of a nail biting moment..bright eyed bushy tailed fixation with the two incomers..gaze perhaps held by Peter rather than Jesus?..& Peters pointed finger hesitatingly in direction of this young pretender..a finger not sure..lacking conviction..shadowed even Peters body posture speaks of hesitation doubt head to one side ..Peter tending to chose first & think later..goes for youth freshness innocence..absence of failure ..wanting to keep well clear of his own real self he knows too well is doubt ridden spontaneous too often proved too hasty ..lacking pause moment of wisdom & the second thought..light shadow line spotlight all seems to be pointing on him..

..but it is the connection language sightlines linking Jesus to Matthew which Caravaggio centres ..look again look beyond the obvious..go into shadows & see what emerges..Jesus in shadow as yet..still to prove to be Messiah..a halo to cement his personage..lean hungry emphasis on ear[ listen] & nose [ scent

of ..] neck muscles taught as he stretches beyond..his arm & finger much more certain definite..up & over top of young pretender just so no doubt it is beyond the expected..yes you ..yes..a look a finger of certainty faith of chosenness of story so far planning expecting this moment of encounter..almost overruling Peter & his indecision..no halo full head of hair well rounded character humanly comfortable ..a little pedestrian in body & spirit?..his cloak wrapped up & over his right shoulder almost in gesture of self reliability independence..a mind of his own..wrapping himself in [ & Jesus out? ]..

- ..so what of Matthew?

Tax collector in centre of frame of colleagues..the wise senior in looks ..well looked after..man of means..long fingered educated left hand..long finger asks long question .."is it me?" finger asks whereas eyes seem to know..beyondness of things.."this isn't new..I've been expecting this..felt it coming on for some time.." beard age forehead of wisdom experience ..yet call to put it all to one side & start anew..three hands each pointing to left..only one with thumb upturned other two downturned..element of uncertainty doubt perhaps ?..

..other two characters on left..focused addicted to money to counting coins & to checking it tallies..books balance..old standing mans adjustment of his spectacles cant really believe what is in front of his eyes..in need of varifocals ..overseer ?..no place at table but called to check progress tallying ..  
..younger seated collector..straight line sight line view to Peter & Jesus along the table..if only he would look up & see what is there for his taking..instead besotted transfixed by counting ..so so careful not to lose count or coinage yet not realising he is losing potentially a lifetimes relationship with the divine & his fellow disciples..fingers hands locked downwards..posture of handicap..held almost magnetically by sight touch of coins..looks forelorn.. bereft..lost..

..what is behind this young mans left arm?..almost another hand..of older standing man encouraging him to look up from his coins & misery ?

- ..a second look at the professional soldier [18hrs after first look ]  
..importance of pause moment..

..is he the extra character [as in Emmaus meal ..the servant ] whose story & inclusion is central?..sitting across his stool..a moment placement of decision ..even shape of stool support looks bridge building spanning a gap..his sword pointing handle first towards Matthew as if in self surrender..about to give up his soldiering for diff form of combat?..powerful legs full of energy potential ..to walk after Jesus..his right hand gripping pushing himself off from seat?

..he leans towards Peters pointed finger of invitation..almost as if he is smelling it..catching sniff of its flavour aroma..the black hole of nothingness or possibility ?..between him and Peter / Jesus ..  
..his black & white vest symbolising contrast of decision..black or white?  
.."behind him" to his left are symbols persons of his old ways taxes team soldiers family colleagues..whilst off to his right the new family of discipleship..a watershed moment for him..  
..is it perhaps Caravaggio himself ?

..& pray where ..in whom ..do I recognise myself now ?  
..& into which personage am I being called from today forward?

- ..& as we did with Caravaggio's "Supper at Emmaus" where we were invited to look beyond the sacrament of the present moment in what Caravaggio has "paused" here & painted, what happens next?..

..who do you think the real Matthew is?  
..if you consider it is the young man fixated by his counting, how do you break the spell in order for Jesus to engage with him? The finger pointing of three of them isn't working so is the call voiced?..  
..does the wise senior next to young Matthew adjusting his glasses speak to him or tap him on shoulder gently? "it's you..the Master is calling you..go to him"  
..or is it the most inquisitive searching character at the table..the young soldier the far side of table to us, who realises [even disappointedly for himself & his own future] that it is the young counter who is being called & he gets up sadly to go length of table to give him "the heads-up".."this is the one" "you are the one" ..Samuel choosing young David the least qualified the least ready..the rookie..

With the material for this Retreat I have included a copy of the painting & some close-ups of it..my own lectio musings on the painting in full..too much to consider in total now but crumbs for you to savour later..  
& a beautiful article by Elizabeth LEV "seeing an old masterpiece with new eyes" with a fascinating historical context to the painting & its commissioning..

- Thank you for being here this morning..do please take more quality time to pray to ponder to speculate under the guidance of the Holy Spirit on the painting, & discover crucially where in whom you find your real self.."someone I am beginning to know much better after this lectio.." & if you have any insights you would like to share with me then please don't hesitate to be in touch..I would love to read them & yeast them into forthcoming sharings of the painting..

"..come follow me" ..& will you?..will you?..

[blessing]