

THE JOURNEY TO EMMAUS

Luke 24:13-35

"Stay with us, stranger"

Azariah Mbatha explains his engraving:

"Two men invite a stranger to be their guest (lower part of the picture). One of them is carrying a sack over his shoulder, to show that he is on a journey. Jesus is the man on the right. At the table, Jesus is sitting in the middle, with his hosts on the right and left. While they eat, they are thinking and talking about how this stranger does some of the same things that Jesus did.

It's only when he breaks bread that they recognise Jesus. This table fellowship is for me a symbol of the new South Africa: people can and must live together. We must show mutual respect for one another's culture.

This is an African table "scene". We see a Zulu woman with her elegant hairstyle. Another woman is carrying a baby on her back. Some people are drinking from the same vessel. Bread is not cut with a knife, but broken by hand. Everyone can come to the table, nobody is excluded, not even the stranger. In an African village, strangers have always been invited to eat. In Africa you can often travel for long distances without meeting a soul. You don't take food with you. If you come to a village, or meet somebody on the way, you are accepted as a stranger, welcomed and offered food. This hospitality is still a tradition in many places, though in others it is beginning to die out.

For me this is not only a biblical scene, it's also a vision of the future. When a stranger is invited into a family, people begin to get to know one another. When they are sitting there, spending time together and making time to be together, they begin to know and understand one another.

The figure of Jesus in the centre of the picture has a face that is partly black, partly white. He has also one black hand and one white hand. This is a picture of how Jesus will return: to be Christ for both black and white! I expect all politicians in South Africa to respect all people in the country, whatever their colour or traditions, and to find ways for all to live peacefully together.

In the top left of the picture, we see the Emmaus-disciples returning to Jerusalem – through a gateway. Jesus becomes invisible again. They are alone, but still gripped by his presence: 'Were not our hearts burning within while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'

The risen Lord will make himself known today for his disciples, as a stranger and outcast."

Discuss:

Read the Emmaus story.

- In the story, Jesus is a stranger who is not rejected, but is even invited for a meal. Have you experienced anything similar here in Norway? Share such experiences with one another.

- Discuss the hospitality that is shown in the story and in the South African explanation. Is it possible to experience something similar in Norway today?
- The stranger is not recognised as Jesus. Discuss why it is so difficult to see God in "the stranger", then and now.

Song: Hamba nathi.

STORIES FROM NORWAY

MEET A MAN FROM TURKEY, 42 YEARS OLD

In Turkey I worked as a journalist, and through my work I became aware of other countries and cultures. I came to Norway and met a Norwegian girl. After we had visited each other a number of times, we decided to get married. I wanted to work as a correspondent for a Turkish television company, but it wasn't possible then. Now we have three children, so it isn't possible for me to go back. In addition I now work for the television company and make news stories from all over Norway and send them to Turkey. I think Norway is a wonderful country. After living here for eleven years I can say that I don't have problems with Norwegians. Norwegians don't like surly people – if I'm cheerful, they are cheerful too. It's important for us immigrants to be forthcoming and open. I can never be 100% Norwegian, and I take care of the Turkish part of me at home. I don't want to show that part of me when I'm with Norwegians. We must do as the Norwegians, follow their rules.

I go to Turkey about ten times a year. In this way I maintain contact with family and friends. I don't have so many friends in Norway. My children are a product of two different cultures. It can be difficult for them. I speak Turkish to them. They understand, but they don't speak it themselves. No-one knows what will happen in the future. Time flies – we grow old so quickly. Previously, I didn't think about growing old. Now I begin to panic. Where do I want to grow old? I don't know. When I'm in Turkey, I long for Norway, and when I'm in Norway, I miss Turkey.

Norwegians are good people. Norwegian laws make provision for all situations. Racists in Norway are not dangerous. They are so few. In other parts of Europe, neo-nazis have a lot of influence – but not here. We must make sure it stays that way.

MEET A FAMILY FROM IRAN

We will proclaim Christ!

"We confess Christ as Lord and Saviour, and we get strength from belonging to him. Even so, we don't want to get baptised yet, because we are afraid that Norwegian authorities won't like it."

The five family members – three of them teenagers – radiate tranquillity and confidence, but unrest and uncertainty have been the main ingredients of their lives for the past few years. For the third time they are in asylum in a church, after the Church Asylum Commission decided in 1997 that there were "insufficient grounds to recommend protection in Norway".

The family comes from Iran, a country where religious laws take precedence over state legislation. The father was involved in a shady venture under the auspices of the Iranian authorities. He estimated the value of artefacts stolen from Kuwait in the wake of the Gulf War. This assignment had to be kept secret, and after a while the father heard that he was to be liquidated when it was completed.

They fled from Iran in the autumn of 1995 – on horseback over the border to Turkey. They were met by a person who transported them to Istanbul. After a few days the journey continued to a country in the Eastern Bloc, and from there via Stockholm to Norway. It was the threat to the father's life that forced the family to flee, and the mother didn't disclose that she and the three children were Christians, and had converted from Islam.

After a friend had told the mother about her faith, the mother began to attend the local church. The children went with her, and they all attended preparation classes for baptism for in all two years. Priests in Iran are generally sceptical about baptising former Muslims, because it can cause problems both for the converts and for themselves. After a long period thinking deeply, the father has also become a Christian, at a summer camp for Christian Iranians.

The family say that they have got a new solicitor. He is familiar with the objections that Norwegian authorities usually raise when they encounter persons who have abandoned the Muslim faith and become "apostates". The family is still baffled that the Church Asylum Commission didn't look more favourably on their case. They don't understand what it is that makes their case less deserving than that of others who were in church asylum last December.

The children go to school – the oldest is in the 10th grade for the third time, since she was not allowed to go on to senior high school. The police have said that they won't arrest the children on their way to or from school. The family are also very grateful for the support they have received from the congregation and local politicians. "We have been given such a good reception here. Everyone wants to hear about our situation. We have been in the newspapers and become celebrities!" they say with a smile.

But behind the smiles lurks a fear– a fear that the officials in the Justice Department's Aliens Office don't believe the family's story, and have decided that they have only become Christians in order to strengthen their case for staying in Norway. A fear that statements from Christian brothers and sisters in Teheran, saying that they must be given protection, have not been given sufficient weight. A fear that Norway doesn't want them to stay.