

Third Sunday of Easter 2020

Gospel: St Luke 24. 13-35

BCP: Monday in Easter Week

Father Mark writes:

Two weeks after our strange and somewhat muted celebration of the Lord's resurrection on Easter Day, the Revised Common Lectionary provides us this Sunday with the story of the Emmaus Road. This is a resurrection story beautifully crafted by St Luke and found only in his Gospel. I hope you will be able to find time to read the story for yourself, either from your Bible or Prayer Book.

The events in today's Gospel happen on the evening of that first Easter Sunday, and we have two of Jesus' disciples walking away from Jerusalem heading west, with the setting sun in their sight. The detail in Luke's writing is particularly striking. He tells us the name of the village where the disciples are heading, and lets us know that it is about seven miles from Jerusalem. We learn that the name of one of the disciples is Cleopas. Luke goes on to depict the emotions of both of them as they stop in sorrow and explain to this stranger they have met on the road, what has happened in Jerusalem. They have been stunned by the report of the empty tomb that the women had given them earlier in the day.

When they arrive at their destination, Jesus seems to be going on further, but they urge him to stay with them. These disciples of Jesus have gradually realised, while they have been travelling, that although they are walking into the sunset, their real destination must be to head towards the sunrise – the new dawn which is breaking all around them: the dawn of a new creation.

It is only when Jesus takes the bread and breaks it for them, that they realise who he is, and their sorrow is so transformed to joy, that they hurry back to Jerusalem to share the good news with the other disciples.

Journey

At the heart of this resurrection appearance there is a journey. One which proves to be transformative not only for the two disciples on the Emmaus Road, but for the new Christian community who will come to believe. Very often our Christian life is described as a journey in which our faith grows, and in which the encounters we have strengthen and sustain us.

In our Lent book this year, Mrs Joan Whyman based her reflections on the theme of 'A Changing Scene' as we journey through life. And this in turn drew on the words of the hymn:

Through all the changing scenes of life,
In trouble and in joy,
The praises of my God shall still
My heart and tongue employ.

Our interrupted journey through Lent this year, took us to the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, as we recalled Jesus travelling the *via dolorosa* – the way of sorrow. This journey took him through the streets of Jerusalem on his way to Calvary. Perhaps now, in the joy of this Easter season you might choose to make use of the Stations of the Resurrection as a prayerful devotion, and the details of these are set out below.

In the course of his trial and execution most of the disciples abandon Jesus. One of them betrays him, one denies him, and many of them flee. But in today's Gospel that same group of frightened believers is coming together again, and trying to make sense of all that has happened.

The disciples on the Emmaus Road describe to Jesus what they have been told by the women who went to the tomb. Then Jesus explains the scriptures to them, and they return to Jerusalem to share again the good news. On that first Easter Sunday evening, the Christian community is assembling to ponder all that Jesus has taught, as they take

on the new life that is now being offered to them through his resurrection.

For us at this time, our journey through life has taken a frightening and unexpected turn. In many ways the current experience of lockdown and social distancing is completely new to us, whether we are eight years old or ninety-eight years old. None of us has seen anything quite like this before.

As Christians who believe in the resurrection, we must trust that we will emerge from this time of anxiety, anguish, or frustrated boredom, into a better day. We have the transformation of the two disciples

on the Emmaus Road as a model of what can happen for us.

I have recently read an article by a coronavirus survivor which has inspired me, and which draws on a different biblical story. Hylton Murray-Philipson who is 61 and spent twelve days in Leicester Royal Infirmary being treated for the virus, has said,

‘Of all the images that came to me in intensive care, the strongest of all was that of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee’. As he struggled to breathe, he recalled that ‘the appearance of Christ rising from sleep in the bow of the boat to calm the waters was precisely what I needed to

calm the storm in my throat and in my mind’.

Meal

After their journey, Jesus is encouraged to stay with the two disciples because the evening is drawing on. It is worth noting that although this stranger has been walking and talking with the disciples for some time, he waits for their invitation, before he decides to stay. He makes as if to go on, but they urge him to remain with them, and Jesus today continues to wait for us to give him an invitation to make his presence real in our own lives.

It is as they share a meal together that Jesus is recognised by these two disciples, as he celebrates the four-fold action of the Eucharist – he takes bread, offers thanks for it, breaks it, and gives it to them.

These actions are a clear reminder of the Last Supper in the Upper Room as the Lord institutes the Eucharist, and also of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and the eucharistic narrative which follows that miracle in the sixth chapter of St John's Gospel.

The risen Jesus makes himself known first by opening the scriptures as he explains the prophecies about himself along the road,

and then in the breaking of the bread. This is the celebration of the new covenant of his death and resurrection.

In these difficult days in which we are living, many will be feeling bereft of the sacraments of the Church, as well as our fellowship together and the opportunity to fully take part in worship. Very little about our current situation is good, but I invite you to regularly make an act of spiritual communion, perhaps as you read your Bible each day, or as you follow a service on television, radio or online. There are many forms of the prayer for Spiritual Communion, but here is one I received recently from the Prayer Book Society:

Grant, O Lord Jesus Christ, that as the
hem of thy garment, touched in faith,
healed the woman who could not
touch thy Body, so the soul of thy
servant may be healed by like faith in
thee, whom I cannot now
sacramentally receive;
through thy tender mercy, who livest
and reignest with the Father in the
unity of the Holy Ghost; ever one
God, world without end. Amen.

In these days when so many of us are
isolated at home, it is often the routine of
our daily meals which give shape to the day.
Perhaps, like me, at times you struggle to
remember which day of the week it is. It is

perhaps reminiscent of the disorientation we sometimes feel between Christmas and New Year when our regular routine is disrupted.

As we continue through these difficult days, I pray that we may be assured that Our Lord accompanies us on our journey of life. We will once again come with joy and great gladness to celebrate the sacraments of the new covenant, as a community reunited in worship, praise and thanksgiving.

When I was in my first teaching appointment, in June each year, the pupils who were about to leave the Junior School set off on a fifty-mile hike along the South Downs to a final destination at Bexhill-on-

Sea. This trek was known as the Leavers' Challenge and just before they set off, at school assembly, they sang the hymn, 'O for a closer walk with God'. Up to then I had only known this as an anthem, but they sang it to the tune of 'Amazing Grace'. I leave you with this hymn as we continue to journey, as the disciples did on the Emmaus Road, through these strange and disturbing days.

O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame;
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

Return, O holy Dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest;
I hate the sins that made thee mourn,
And drove thee from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only thee.

So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb. Amen.

Stations of the Resurrection

First Station
The earthquake
Matthew 28. 2-4

Second Station
Mary Magdalene finds the empty tomb
John 20. 1-2

Third Station
The disciples run to the empty tomb
John 20. 3-8

Fourth Station
The angel appears to the women
Mark 16. 3-8

Fifth Station
Jesus meets the women
Matthew 28. 9-10

Sixth Station
The road to Emmaus
Luke 24. 28-35

Seventh Station
Jesus appears to the disciples
Luke 24. 36-43

Eight Station
Jesus promises the Spirit
Luke 24. 44-49

Ninth Station
Jesus commissions the disciples
John 20. 21-23

Tenth Station
Jesus breathes the Spirit in the upper room
John 20. 22-23

Eleventh Station
Jesus reveals himself to Thomas
John 20. 24-29

Twelfth Station
Jesus appears at the lakeside
John 21. 9-13

Thirteenth Station
Jesus confronts Peter
John 21. 15-19

Fourteenth Station
Jesus and the beloved disciple
John 21. 20-23

Fifteenth Station
Jesus appears to over five hundred at once
1 Corinthians 15. 3-6

Sixteenth Station
Jesus commissions the disciples
on the mountain
Matthew 28. 16-20

Seventeenth Station

The ascension

Acts 1. 3-11

Eighteenth Station

Pentecost

Acts 2. 1-11

Nineteenth Station

Jesus appears to Saul (Paul)

Acts 9. 1-18