

Reading for the Day – Luke 24:13-35

The Walk to Emmaus

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[f] from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad.^[g] ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹ He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth,^[h] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.^[i] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.'

²⁵ Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah^[j] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us^[k] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

On the Emmaus Road

Address by Revd Mandy Flaherty

Probably, like me, from time to time you have had the experience of not being able to find something and all the frustration that goes with that. You spend ages searching in all the places where you think it should be all to no avail. And then, you eventually find it in a really obvious place and you think, I really should have seen that, it was right under my nose! But you were so caught up in the searching, you missed what was obvious. Our story this morning is the well known story of the two disciples on travelling to Emmaus on the day of Jesus' resurrection and they missed something for quite a while that was right under their noses. Emmaus, as the text says, is about 6 or 7 miles from Jerusalem and perhaps begs the question, who were these disciples and what were they doing on this road?

Well, we are given the name of one of them – Cleopas – and we have heard of him before, in John's gospel when describing the disciples who stood at the cross when Jesus was crucified 'Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene.' It seems from this description that the wife of Cleopas was named Mary and was with the other Mary's at the cross when Jesus was crucified – so many Mary's! So, if Cleopas was one of the disciples on the Emmaus road, it is likely that the other was his wife, Mary. And they were returning to, presumably, their home in Emmaus after being in Jerusalem at the crucifixion. Now these two are not part of the regular disciples we hear so much about. The risen Jesus chooses to appear, first to Mary Magdalene and then to an ordinary man and his wife – Cleopas and Mary - before he appears to the regulars. And they don't recognise him. Jesus goes about his business chatting with them and unfolding the scriptures to them without them having a clue who he was. He is part of their journey to Emmaus

I wonder how much, during this crisis, we have experienced God's presence without even really knowing it? For each of us we see God personally and privately, even more so now that our homes are our places of worship. Our church buildings are closed and, traditionally, maybe, we would have gone to our churches to pray, to see God, to worship and to hear Him. We expect to find him there. But now that has been temporarily taken away from us, where else are we finding God with us? And perhaps not even realising it. Our pony, Ziggy, is moving yards this weekend – needs must as his present yard is closing down. We have had a little miracle in finding another place so close by with almost the same set up and it came about unexpectedly – we have seen God doing that although we didn't realise it – we had been resigned to a much less appealing option and then this happened out of the blue. I am sure you can think of other moments 'out of the blue' that remind us that God is still present with us, even in unexpected situations. He can and does 'appear' when we have needs. There is the very heartwarming story on the news this week of an old gentleman and his 17 year old carer who formed a bond due to her kindness in creating a cushion with his late wife's picture on that he

could cuddle at night – how profound! In psalm 23 God says, ‘when you walk through the shadow of the valley of death, I will be with you, my rod and my staff will comfort you’ - well in this case, it is a cushion that comforts! But God appears at unexpected moments to bring light and revelation, as he did on the Emmaus road.

So, where do we find God right now? If not in our churches? He is found in all the little acts of kindness that we see around us, the spontaneous outreach that is shown and the quiet, humble person who just goes about their business quietly. Our new yard owner says she finds God ‘out there, that’s my church’ - pointing to the middle of a field with horses in it. I can understand what she means. There is something awe inspiring about the natural world at this moment in time. And maybe God has never been more present because he is definitely seen out there in the world and not just in our church buildings.

This story in Luke, is also about witness. It is important to note these two ordinary people and where they fit into the narrative of Jesus’ disciples. If we look back at verse 9 in Luke 24, there is the account of the women who had seen the angel, recounting this to the disciples ‘and all the rest’ All the rest seems to refer to this mysterious group of 70 odd people, which includes the two disciples on the Emmaus road, that Jesus sent out in Matthew and were apart from the 12. It makes sense to realise that the World Christian church was not and could not be built just by the 12 Apostles – a greater army and workforce was needed – hence ‘all the rest’. And it is to people in this group that Jesus appears to first, signifying perhaps, that the message of the gospel is for all peoples and not just a few. The Christian church does not survive on just a few people or buildings – it is the work, witness and love of many in their communities that show the gospel message, not least our carers and NHS staff, frontline workers and essential workers – those who may hitherto, have been ignored, under valued and under appreciated, who struggle financially to make ends meet, who may be shy and quiet, unassuming in their work and see themselves as ordinary. Ordinary is good. The world needs ordinary. Much talk these days is about building things up again once the current crisis is over. We will be a society who has to re-build. And the church can play a key part in that, if we continue to look outwards, away from our buildings and focus on our world and community as a whole. If we see it as a journey – from Jerusalem to Emmaus. By the time the disciples reach Emmaus and Jesus is invited to stay for supper to break bread with them, then they realise who he is – THEN, the penny drops and things fall into place. And they decide to rush back to Jerusalem to tell the others – must have been a very long day – a 12 mile round trip walk! Not quite as long as our Benefice walk but nevertheless, quite a journey!

They went on a journey to Emmaus to discover who Jesus was and then they rushed right back to Jerusalem to tell others. All of us are on a journey of some kind – none that has uncertainties in it as to when it will end and what will happen but alongside those uncertainties are also those exciting discoveries and revelations that help us to realise that God’s presence is with

us, even when we don't expect it to be. And that, on this journey, we can learn new things. Jesus taught Cleopas and Mary while they were walking along. We are never too old to learn and life long learning is something that enriches and stimulates our lives. So, what new things are you learning in lockdown? Let me know, it would be good to see the variety of interests that we have to keep ourselves well and functioning. As you might imagine, I am learning how to use editing software and social media platforms! But I also wondered if I could use this time to start learning the piano again ... so watch this space! Not saying I will be accompanying any hymn singing either now or ever though!

It's important to look forward and behind when we're on the road and to live as if we're constantly expecting God to pop up out of nowhere! For God's presence to be revealed to us in the middle of whatever situation and journey we're in. God's presence transcends our buildings and the gospel message of love, forgiveness and salvation is freely available to all. If you would like to discuss any of this any further, please DO get in touch and I would be more than happy to carry the discussion on. In the meantime, many blessings to each and every one of you as you seek God and wherever you find Him.

Amen.