

## **Sermon for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter**

### **The Road to Emmaus**

**Lk. 24.13-35**

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Let us pray

Lord, be with us as we contemplate your words and bring us to a greater understanding of your love and faithfulness.

Amen

Picture the scene - two followers of Jesus, one named Cleopas, one unnamed, but thought by many to be his wife, are walking

the seven miles from Jerusalem to their home at Emmaus.

They are not out for a nice Sunday afternoon stroll but are walking purposefully - perhaps to put some distance between them and the tragedy of Good Friday a couple of days before. Perhaps too there's a fear that Jesus' followers may yet still be rounded up by the authorities for questioning.

If Cleopas is the same person as Clopas mentioned in Matthew's Gospel, then we

may hazard a guess that the woman's name may well have been Mary, who was one of the women standing near the cross on Good Friday. She may too have been one of the women who had been to the tomb that morning and found it empty, and heard the angels' message. We cannot know, but let's hold onto that thought.

So, we have an interesting scenario developing - Mary and Cleopas are, according to the original Greek wording, not merely discussing but arguing, like only a husband and wife can do perhaps. I can

just imagine her saying, in effect, "I know what we saw - the tomb was empty, and I know what the angels said - *'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but is risen'* - we were terrified! (v. 5).

And I can imagine Cleopas responding scornfully, *'Your words are an idle tale woman!* - just a few hysterical women with vivid imaginations - people don't rise from the dead - at least not until the general resurrection at the end of the age, and even that's questionable'.

And so, as they walked along, a stranger drew alongside them and asked them what they were arguing about.

And so begins a conversation. Cleopas with sadness, which should more accurately be translated 'sullenness', informs the stranger, who, Cleopas implies, should have known what had been going on in Jerusalem just two days ago - Cleopas speaks of disappointed hopes - a promised future that seemed to be no more. And astonishment at the women's news, or was it disbelief?

If they *had* begun to realise that Jesus was the long-awaited messiah, there was apparently no expectation that this messiah would die, let alone return to life after death.

Jesus' answer though seems quite harsh - *'Oh how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe ....'*

He seems to imply that they should have believed the evidence, they should have known their Scriptures better.

But their eyes are blind, so they cannot see Jesus for who he is.

And so, Jesus begins a life-changing lesson for the couple on the road to Emmaus that afternoon, begins to open their eyes to the truth. Their thinking is being turned upside down and inside out but this is the beginning of a life-long journey into Christ.

The climax of the event will be the meal they are to share that evening, for it is during the meal that their eyes are fully opened as the stranger reveals himself to

them in the way he assumes the role of host, the way he takes the bread, blesses it and breaks it. Something in this normal action at the beginning of any Jewish meal must have been characteristic of Jesus during his ministry - perhaps it brought back memories of other shared meals, perhaps the feeding of the 5000, perhaps also, although less likely for them, as they were probably not present, the Last Supper.

Cleopas and his wife were privileged to have had this precious personal encounter

with the risen Jesus. They did not keep it to themselves but they rushed back to Jerusalem right away to tell the rest of the gathered community. I wonder if their hearts were still burning within them. Others too, like Charles Wesley, have spoken about feeling their own hearts strangely warmed by Christ's affirming presence.

And there, in the upper room in Jerusalem, Cleopas and his wife's experience was affirmed by the news that Jesus had appeared to Peter too. And then, together

with the assembled brothers and sisters they all experienced a further revelation of the risen Christ.

What a day that had been!

But us, where are we in this story?

Are we too perhaps are on the road to Emmaus, but if so, are we running away from truth or journeying toward it?

For we are all on a life-long journey towards a fuller understanding of who Jesus is, a journey from disbelief, through doubting, towards an unshakeable faith - a journey towards home.

We too are often unaware that Jesus walks with us on the road, waiting for us to ask for his guidance and help to grow through our own doubts and unbelief.

As we read our Scriptures, he is there waiting to speak to us, if only we can stop thinking and speaking long enough to ask and to listen. He is waiting to be invited to open our eyes so that we may be prepared to receive him in the celebration of the Eucharist, as members together of the community of faith.

For even in this time of social distancing I believe we are blessed through the words of Scripture and our Eucharistic liturgy, and through the action of taking, blessing and giving thanks over the bread and wine.

We are all present at this Eucharist feast.

We are being fed and nurtured and held together as Christ's community of faith as we look forward to the time when we can all be together again and once again take the bread and wine ourselves.

One thing I found encouraging in this reading was that Cleopas and his wife found their hearts warmed by the presence of Christ without actually eating the bread themselves.

Let's hold onto the hope that, when we can meet together in person again and share in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, our joy like theirs will be overwhelming - so much greater because we have remained faithful to Christ and to one another over this time and shared in the wanting and waiting.

And so we pray -

Lord, be with us and bless us, warm our hearts with your Holy Spirit, and keep us faithful to you and to one another. Amen.

The Revd Elaine Bission

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