

Third Sunday of Easter – YrA – 23 April 2023

Message – Hope

Source of All Being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit, open our eyes to your image in all whom we meet. **Amen.**

The beautiful story Luke recounts of the two disciples on the Emmaus Road takes place in the evening of the first Easter Day. An extended version of this is, unsurprisingly, the reading set for the Easter evening service of all three years of our lectionary cycle of readings.

The Easter evening service is, perhaps, when those involved in all the services of Holy Week and Easter can take a breath. The intensity of Holy Week and Easter and Luke's well-crafted narrative, open us to the intensity of feeling of the disciples and the emotions of the two travelling to Emmaus.

Commentators on this passage read it in diverse ways. Ranging from a simple telling of a resurrection encounter to a complete model for the early church, either in its worship or its mission. Some see the narrative as a factual account, others as a Lukan construct to convey his message to the early church. It may, of course, be both. Whatever, our approach to the passage, as people of faith we seek to apply it to ourselves, the church, and our context.

At the start of the story, we wonder why Cleopas and his walking companion fail to recognise Jesus. We may similarly wonder why many around fail to recognise the significance of Christ. With a little introspection we will accept that the Church, as an expression of the Body of Christ, has done

much to hide the good news of Christ. That some people can still hear the message is probably more remarkable than that many cannot.

Cleopas and his companion have perceived something significant in Jesus of Nazareth, *'a prophet mighty in deed and word before God'*. Yet, the events of the last few days did not fit with their perception of the work of God's Messiah.

Many people exploring religion, faith, and things spiritual, will have a perception of what faith should look like. All of us come to faith with an agenda. None of us can approach anything in a truly neutral way. Life is full of assumptions. Our journey of faith will challenge many of our assumptions and suppositions. We cannot change every aspect of our worldview in an instant. Though we may have moment of great revelation along the way, to be transformed takes time.

Change in our spiritual life needs us to be in the right place emotionally, physically, mentally, communally, spiritually. Not everyone is ready to or wants to change. But Cleopas and his companion are open and Jesus engages them in a way that he can be reasonably confident they will be able to hear and the essence of which they will remember and that, ultimately, will help their spiritual journey.

In today's parlance, Jesus did a bit of Bible bashing. We don't know which passages or what aspects of the overarching narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures Jesus used. One might suspect that the two disciples didn't remember the exact details. It was the building of a picture that allowed them to see the events of the last few days in a new light.

Some think Christians should be explaining the good news of Jesus of Nazareth with similar, Bible bashing approaches today. As a chaplain, I have seen the fallout from this. It is rarely affective and often puts a barrier in the way of people engaging with our faith, sometimes with any kind of faith.

Today, we cannot assume that people know the Bible or that quoting from it will be in anyway significant to them. We need to meet people where they are. That means getting to know them and understand them. We cannot communicate effectively with those we do not know. Yet there are aspects of our human nature which do allow us some degree of communication. Acts of hospitality, care, love, kindness, and compassion generally communicate across even challenging barriers.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus are in fact the ones who offer hospitality, an act of kindness for a stranger. Our accepting such acts, may be as important as our offering them. One of the quickest ways of building trust is by allowing others to help us. Humans are bewildering at times. Jesus is now on their turf. They are open to hearing more and Jesus now explains in actions rather than words.

Opinion is divided as to whether this is an echo of the last supper. The gospels imply that only the apostles were present but perhaps the apostles had already recounted the evening to others. We don't know. The breaking of bread is highly significant to us. We do hear the echo of the last supper, but it may have been more general hospitality that the two disciples saw in that action. Perhaps a more general breaking of bread could be at the heart of our community to.

The two disciples rush back to Jerusalem, only to find that Peter has stolen their thunder. Are they the also-rans in all of this. No, other than a reference in Corinthians and the mention here, we know nothing of Peter's encounter with Jesus on Easter Day. The story of these two disciples is the encounter with the risen Christ that was recorded for us to hear and understand.

Meeting the disciples on the Road to Emmaus Jesus does not say, hey it's me. He journeys with them as a companion. Even the phrase translated '*Oh, how foolish you are*' may not be as harsh as it sounds. Jesus meets them where they are, physically, mentally, and emotionally. He invites them to take him on their journey. Jesus speaks to their culture, their beliefs, their hopes, and their fears. Christ takes them on a journey from where they are to their next step of faith.

The Emmaus Road is a physical journey but it was also a spiritual, a faith, journey and it symbolically holds that meaning for us to. We are on a journey of faith and spirit. We are at different points along that journey. Each person's journey, while sharing common elements, is unique.

We are called to share the good news we have received and to support those around us on their journey too. We need to meet others wherever they are on that journey.

Jesus had a good idea where the two disciples were in their journey. We can learn from his getting them to tell him their perspective, their story. God may give us a helping hand but more than anything, we need to use our gifts and to be open to and attentive to the other person.

Today we have no shared religious, faith, or spiritual language. We live in a pluralistic society that suspects grand narratives and ours is the grandest of all narratives. It will be met with a hermeneutic of suspicion. It needs to be demonstrated to be authentic and true in everything that we do, in the being and action of our community.

This afternoon, the vestry will be reflecting on the nature of our community, what it is we stand for, our shared values, our purpose, how we express the mission of God in this place.

This will build on the consultation undertaken in preparation for appointment of a new dean. It will build on the many experiences vestry members have of this community and knowledge of the needs of the wider community. It will need to embrace the Emmaus Road journey. We are called to be a community that is journeying together and supporting one another in our individual journey's and embracing those who wish to be on such a journey.

Supporting the diverse needs of our community and our wider community with our limited resources is a challenge. It won't be by endless programs; it may be by the way that we all learn to seek out the stranger, who seems to be walking by, engaging with them and seeing where the conversation may lead. It may lead to our helping the stranger in their journey or it may just turn out that they are the ones who will in fact deepen our faith as Christ did for the two disciples on the Emmaus Road.

May we always be open to the image of God in others and may they see the image of God in us. Amen. Amen. Amen.