

A Reflection from Revd Jane for the Second Sunday of Easter ~ 11th April 2021

The Road to Emmaus is one of my favourite stories following the resurrection of Jesus. It was probably early afternoon when these two people from the circle of disciples left Jerusalem. As they walk and talk, we get a sense of their utter bewilderment - they had hoped Israel would be set free from Roman domination by Jesus, but instead he had died at their hands. They struggled to reconcile the events they had witnessed with the identity of the one they loved. Everything had been taken and shaken and a great cloud of confusion and uncertainty hovered over them.

It was as they walked away from Jerusalem towards Emmaus, and talked about these things that had happened in the last couple of days that a stranger came alongside them and walked with them. Their faces were perhaps flushed through sadness, perhaps animated in speaking and discussing these things together - especially the confusing report of the women and the empty tomb. All these things kept their focus away from the stranger and fixed on the past events. And I just wonder, how often does our own unbelief and doubt in situations, especially perhaps at this current time, keep our hearts sad, keep our minds confused and our eyes turned away from the very one who would walk with us and bring us fresh hope and joy. These two disciples on the Emmaus road had erected such a wall of hopelessness around themselves, were so trapped in their misery and fear, that they no longer had any expectation - all hope had gone.

But Jesus questions them and they start to pour out their hearts to him. Even when he gently rebukes them he starts to teach them and opens up the Word to them. The Living Word revealing the written Word. He goes through it all with them - the promises, the stories, the images - and shows them how they are all fulfilled in him. The Bible isn't a reference book, a book of examples to live up to. It is a book all about Jesus. The disciples own expectations had got confused with what God was actually doing and they had therefore not seen the deeper truths that were actually at work.

How quickly the journey to Emmaus must have passed as Jesus unwrapped the scriptures for them. Fresh hope was returning, things that had been confused were starting to make sense, things were beginning to click into place. But even as they were staring the risen Lord Jesus in the face, they were prevented from seeing him. Why was that? Because they needed to see him in the scriptures. He was not always going to be there, physically present with them, so they needed to be taught to trust his Word, not just the manifestation of his body. Peter writes in his first letter, 'Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls'.

But as they near Emmaus, he wasn't going to stop with them. It was their longing for Him to remain with them that caused Him to stay. That's true for us too. Jesus will only ever stay where there are hearts that long for Him, only then will He stay and not walk on. But now there is a shift in their relationship. He was a stranger; he went in as their guest; but now He is the one in charge, He is the master, He is the one who has taken up the bread and is breaking it.

It is the moment that he breaks bread and blesses it that their eyes were opened and they knew who he was. As soon as they saw Him and knew Him and recognized Him, He left, vanished from their view. Verse 31 says 'Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight'. What He had come to do had been accomplished. This wasn't about recognition of his features - they had come to fully recognize Jesus in all his significance as the Messiah, the Son of God - their risen Lord! He disappeared because no longer was their fellowship with him dependent on their ability to see him.

This Road to Emmaus is a picture of our walk, of our journey of faith. Jesus as a stranger, walks alongside us but we don't know, don't have the revelation of who he is. Then he becomes a guest and the Living Word makes known the written word and it burns us, pierces us, gives us a passion for God and the things of God, and then revelation comes and no longer is Jesus a stranger or a guest but he is Lord and Master.

These stories become so familiar to us we can pass them by without really thinking about the road we are on ourselves. Are we walking with the Lord and don't know it? Is he a stranger to us? Or is he a guest? Come be with us today Lord - perhaps Sunday for an hour - but don't overstay your welcome. Or is he Lord and Master? If that is the case then that turns our world upside down...the things we hold dear, turned upside down so it is him that takes first place. Just like these two travellers, we will want others too, to know the good news of the risen Jesus - that is why we want to pray for Fillongley, to bless her with the knowledge of Jesus, to have her eyes opened to Him.

We also need to pray for ourselves - that we will see the new things God is preparing and doing. These two travellers were still dealing with the death of Jesus and couldn't see him risen in front of their eyes. As we have gone through and are still going through this time of difficulty, when we too face fear, grief, and trauma, we need to ask God - what are you wanting to prepare us for so we are ready as we come out from this time.

There will be changes as we emerge from this lockdown and we need to make sure that we are following his leading. Isaiah 43: 19 says, ' See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? He doesn't want us to stay captive to the past and the old way of doing things but to remember that new wine needs new wineskins.

May we trust God to lead us forward.
Amen.