
¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about eleven kilometres 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 recognising Him. ¹⁷ And He said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. 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, 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. 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 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. Luke 24:13-27

This the day the LORD has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

Why are you here this morning? It may seem an odd question to ask on Easter Day, after all, Easter is the heart-beat of the Christian faith. As the Apostle Paul says (1 Corinthians 15:14,19): "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."

We all know that Easter is important. That is why many people gather in worship today – be in Church buildings, or church at home. But I still come back to that question – why are you here in worship this day? It is important for us to consider, and re-consider this question. Why do Christians attend worship? Why do we seek to "not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (as we heard in the Reading on Good Friday – Hebrews 10:25).

Let's be honest – there are all sorts of 'reasons' why people 'attend worship'. For some, it's simply because 'mum and dad make us'. For others, it's a matter of habit and custom – it's something you always do. For others, it's a place of fellowship, and meeting people (not being alone). There are all sorts of reasons why people may (or may not) attend worship this, and other days.

But the true reason to gather in worship is that Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!). This is the day the Lord has made! (Let us rejoice and be glad in it!). We celebrate the gift of life God has given us in Jesus. We know about the forgiveness of sins that breaks down the dividing wall of hostility. God has done something incredible in the

bodily resurrection of Jesus, and this changes everything. The question should never be “Why are you worshipping today”, but “Why not worship this day, and every day”?

However, as we come to the account of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, we get an insight into the reasons why sometimes we struggle to worship (in a building, or at home in our every day life). Put very simply, we struggle to see Jesus. The eyes of our hearts are fixed on other things. It may be the trials and troubles of this world. It may be the hurt and pains we have experienced from other Christians (who, but the way, are equally sinful as yourself). Or we may simply be distracted by many other things of ‘this life’. And so we are something like those disciples on the way to Emmaus.

We have before us this morning one of the most vivid and insightful accounts of our Lord's appearances after His resurrection. Luke is the only one of the four gospel writers to include this story. It is a story that reveals to us not only something about who we are, but how Jesus opens our eyes to see Him for who He is and about how we can come to know Him.

The journey to Emmaus is both a literal and a spiritual journey. On one hand it recounts the story of two disciples who, after the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord, walk eleven kilometres from Jerusalem to their village of Emmaus. On the other hand, it outlines for us the journey that we all take from not recognising Jesus, to understanding what the Scripture says about Him, to recognising Him for who He is, and finally to our giving witness of what we have experienced.

We may note various things from the Bible passage today (Luke 24:13-27) that speaks into our situations.

- 1) Jesus seeks His disciples. Jesus walked along the way with them. And He walks along the way with you.
- 2) The disciples did not recognise Jesus. There are all sorts of ‘theories’ as to why this is the case. The direction they travelled, the sun was in their eyes; one does not expect to see a dead person walking with them; and God the Holy Spirit prevented them from seeing Jesus at this time so that they may see Him more deeply at a more appropriate time.
- 3) They had little faith. They had heard the reports of the women who went to the tomb. They had seen the empty tomb for themselves and yet they had not believed. The supernatural working of God to raise Jesus from the dead was outside their paradigm. They had never seriously considered who Jesus was.
- 4) Jesus opens our eyes. Verse 27 says, "Then beginning with Moses and from all the prophets Jesus interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scripture." Scripture gives testimony of who Jesus is. He uses it today to open the eyes of those who do not know Him.
- 5) Jesus reveals Himself. It was only as they had fellowship with Jesus that He disclosed Himself to them. Jesus reveals Himself to those whose eyes He has opened through the truths of His Word. It is not without significance that it is around the supper table that the disciples' eyes are opened and they see Jesus for who He really is.

- 6) But when they recognised Him He disappeared. Fellowship with Him was not going to depend on their ability to see Him, but rather upon their taking Him at His word.
- 7) And notice finally their response. Once they recognised Him, they could not help but share Him. Can you imagine the excitement they must have felt? They said to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" Their encounter with Jesus had been emotional. It had stirred them on the inside. It had moved their very hearts. And once moved they could not help but share.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke emphasizes the importance of walking in faith and avoiding unbelief. He has made it clear that every individual who meets Jesus Christ must make a decision about Him. Christ must be received or rejected. His claims must be believed or denied.

Jesus opened the eyes of the two disciples to recognise him. I think we must be meant to see this as, in a sense, a reversal of the story of Adam and Eve in the garden. When they took the forbidden fruit, their eyes were opened: but it was to know evil, to see sin. And because of that they were no longer able to see God; no longer able freely to converse with him. It meant, too, that with their innocence gone, they no longer had access to unimpeded knowledge of goodness, or beauty or truth. And they were driven out of the garden, to wander about in a hostile land of exile.

But now, in the light of the resurrection - in the light of Easter Day - the eyes of the disciples are opened, and they see Jesus. Now, in him, they see everything differently. Instead of disconsolate despair: hope; and with hope a new energy, a new life, and a new understanding. So they reverse their journey and hasten back towards the holy City, symbol of the Church. Even as they share their joy, they find themselves united with the other disciples better than ever before.

Religious festivals- even Easter- can be both wonderful and painful. As one parishioner joked, after all the worship services of Holy Week, the congregation sings jubilantly, "Christ is alive" and the pastor falls on the recliner chanting, "I am dead." Celebrations for some people almost always are times of depression for others. The more some folks laugh, the louder other people weep. In the midst of loss, even good and faithful followers can lose sight of the promise they have been given.

Before Jesus began with a faith-restoring proclamation of the Gospel, He admonished the two of them. "He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?'" After admonishing the two for their doubt and disbelief, the Lord Jesus proceeded to lead them in a Bible study. "Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Yes, Jesus told them and us that He is clearly revealed in the Old Testament of the Bible as the Son of God and the only Saviour for all sinners!

Christ made it very clear to them that the crucifixion was not an accident, and that what they heard about the resurrection was not merely a dream. Both His death and resurrection actually happened, just as the Old Testament writers had foretold. For example, remember the words of the Psalmist written a thousand years before

Jesus was crucified, "They pierced My hands and My feet," Psalm 22:16, and the words of Job written fifteen hundred years earlier, "I know that my Redeemer lives," Job 19:25. It was necessary for Christ to suffer and die in order to deliver us from sin. He had taken upon Himself your sins and mine, the sins of all people. For these He paid the price on Calvary's cross. It was necessary for Him to rise again so that we have a risen Redeemer and ever-living Lord. Now sin, death and the devil are all conquered for us. There is peace and pardon and the promise of life eternal.

Do you know Jesus this morning? Have your eyes ever been opened to who He is and what He has done for you? Do you know that He walks with you and talks with you? Can you testify to His presence in your life? Do you have fellowship with Him? Has your experience with Him been so real, so moving, so life changing that it has caused you to tell others about Him? What will you do with Jesus this morning?

It may be surprising to you, but none of Jesus' resurrection appearances was marked by dramatic settings or regal greetings. There were no trumpets playing "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" or a choir singing, Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" at the empty tomb. Instead, we read that Jesus was mistaken for a gardener. He showed up on a dusty road. He walked along a shoreline watching His disciples fish. So unexpected was the resurrection, that when Jesus' walked into their midst, some disciples thought he was a ghost and others refused to believe what they saw.

Now that should be good news to you. For if somehow, you missed the good news of Easter, if you are still walking on an empty road to a place where you do not know the ending, this morning is for you.

Jesus could have done a lot of things in the hours immediately after His resurrection. If we were to look at this from a simply natural point of view, He could have supernaturally appeared in the highest court of any land. He could have appeared in Rome to Caesar. He could have appeared to the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin. He could have appeared in the Temple and showed all the priesthood and Levites that He was indeed is who he said he was. But interestingly enough, Jesus spent, a great portion of his first day as the Resurrected King, simply walking down a road to Emmaus with two disciples. And what is interesting is that we don't know hardly anything about these two disciples. And I think you know the reason for that.

You see all of us are on a road. We are all in a sense on that road to Emmaus. We are on the journey of life. And there are many of us, who while we have heard about Jesus, we need more to fully comprehend who He is. And that is the heart of Jesus. He wants to know you personally. He wants you to know him personally. Jesus has always been the one who came to seek people on their journey.

Behold the risen Christ! You can never be alone again. We are the sons and daughters of the resurrected God. Because He lives we shall live also, and so every Sunday we celebrate the great truth of this holy day. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive and he comes to us in our grief and need and listens to us. We are not alone. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.