

## Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April - 3rd Sunday of Easter

*Opening hymn – All my hope on God is founded*

All my hope on God is founded;  
he doth still my trust renew,  
me through change and chance he guideth,  
only good and only true.  
God unknown, he alone  
calls my heart to be his own.

Pride of man and earthly glory,  
sword and crown betray his trust;  
what with care and toil he buildeth,  
tower and temple fall to dust.  
But God's power, hour by hour,  
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,  
deep his wisdom, passing thought:  
splendour, light and life attend him,  
beauty springeth out of naught.  
Evermore, from his store  
newborn worlds rise and adore.

Still from man to God eternal  
sacrifice of praise be done,  
high above all praises praising  
for the gift of Christ, his Son.  
Christ doth call one and all:  
ye who follow shall not fall.

*Easter greeting:*

Alleluia, Christ is risen!  
**He is risen indeed, Alleluia!**

*Praise – Psalm 116:1-3; 10-end*

- 1 I love the Lord,  
    for he has heard the voice of my supplication;  
    because he inclined his ear to me  
        on the day I called to him.
- 2 The snares of death encompassed me;  
    the pains of hell took hold of me;  
    by grief and sorrow was I held.
- 3 Then I called upon the name of the Lord:  
    ‘O Lord, I beg you, deliver my soul.’
- 10 How shall I repay the Lord  
    for all the benefits he has given to me?
- 11 I will lift up the cup of salvation  
    and call upon the name of the Lord.
- 12 I will fulfil my vows to the Lord  
    in the presence of all his people.
- 13 Precious in the sight of the Lord  
    is the death of his faithful servants.
- 14 O Lord, I am your servant,  
    your servant, the child of your handmaid;  
        you have freed me from my bonds.
- 15 I will offer to you a sacrifice of thanksgiving  
    and call upon the name of the Lord.
- 16 I will fulfil my vows to the Lord  
    in the presence of all his people,
- 17 In the courts of the house of the Lord,  
    in the midst of you, O Jerusalem.  
  
Alleluia.

**All** Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

*Collect for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter*

Risen Christ,  
you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:  
strengthen us to proclaim your risen life  
and fill us with your peace,  
to the glory of God the Father.

**Amen**

*Readings*

*Acts 2:14a, 36-41*

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.’

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’ Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.’ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

*Luke 24:13-35*

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. 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?’ 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, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 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. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 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. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

*Sermon – Sarah Penfold*

*Walking the road*

Tom Wright, a former Bishop of Durham, has described the walk to Emmaus as 'the finest scene Luke ever sketched'. Certainly, you can feel that you are walking the road with the two disciples.

Who were the people heading out to Emmaus that day? Luke tells us that one was Cleopas but nothing about the other. Some sources think that he may have been with his wife, Mary, and that would explain the words of one

translation I read,’ they were discussing and arguing with each other’. I’m sure that most couples can identify with that idea of a discussion argument.

Whoever they were they were evidently comfortable with each other. We have this ‘married’ couple walking to a village 7 miles distant. 7 miles? Surely that is an unnecessary detail? But it leaves us knowing that this was not an idle stroll. This was two people intentionally going somewhere – maybe they just felt a need to get away from Jerusalem.

So far so everyday. But these two are so preoccupied by their grief that when they are joined by a stranger they share their deepest thoughts without any hesitation despite the danger of admitting to being followers of Jesus. The stranger’s apparent ignorance of recent events should alert them but no, they carry on telling him of disappearing bodies, of angels’ messages. The conversation develops. The stranger explains the scriptures to them. He understands how they are feeling. By the time they reach Emmaus a relationship has developed and they invite him to eat with them.

It is at the table that the story moves from the everyday to the extraordinary. The stranger blesses and breaks the bread, and at that moment Cleopas and Mary see the risen Jesus. And he vanishes. They rush all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples.

As I have been writing this I have found myself questioning why Jesus appeared to two disciples who were not part of the inner group – the twelve, now eleven. But that is a feature of the post resurrection appearances. They were to groups which might include but were not exclusively the initial group of disciples. Jesus was alive for everyone, then as now. Not just alive for chosen groups of people. Not just alive for people who acknowledge him. Jesus is alive for everyone.

It is a fine piece of story telling and has an immediate relevance to us. The disciples’ situation contains an ambiguity that is not unlike our own current situation. It all appears so familiar, so everyday but that normality is held against a backdrop that is very far from normal. Our backdrop coronavirus, theirs the crucifixion.

Cleopas and Mary are walking to Emmaus and at the end of their journey they have a meal. Here it is April and winter is moving into spring. The grass is growing, gardens are springing into life. People are having birthdays, anniversaries, for many work and school continue, even if at home, there is dusting, vacuuming and even sermon writing. But just as the disciples journeyed with hearts full of grief, with an emptiness, and a feeling of ‘what

next', so many of us are nursing the hurt of friends or relatives who have died or are sick. And all the difficulty of attending funerals.

A friend told me of their dilemma about an elderly relative. The virus had entered her care home. Did they rush to bring mother to their house? Probably safer for her but risking bringing the virus into a household with two other vulnerable people? I have been conscious as I have kept in touch not just with the people on my list from the church family, but also friends and other family of all the things people have told me that would not normally have been said. This could be because our conversations are usually too public, or too rushed. I suspect that like the disciples going to Emmaus it is because in our anxiety and grief we become more open, our defences go down and our emotions flood out. Who better to share those thoughts and fears with than the risen Jesus?

As we practice social distancing and electronic communication, I find that I recognise people in different ways. Less by their gestures and more from a distant silhouette, from their electronically distorted voice or their number appearing on my screen. I pass people in the street thinking that I recognise them but out of the usual context who can they be? So too for our disciples on the road. Who would recognise someone who they knew to be dead and was in the wrong place? But when the recognition comes they spring into action. They set off back to Jerusalem to share the good news. When later we receive the good news of the lifting of lockdown it is unlikely that we will immediately be able to set out on a journey. But like the disciples we will be moving into a different world, one with which we are unfamiliar, and where our joy will be mixed with sadness at the people and events that we miss.

For the moment, like Cleopas and Mary, we walk a road which is at the same time familiar and uncharted. Like them we can walk it with Christ and can share all our hopes and fears for the future, and find ourselves comforted. For the answers we need to trust in God. Circumstances mean that we cannot share a meal as at Emmaus, but we can recognise his presence in our lives and we can continue to share God's goodness and prayers for each other as we walk together.

*Introduction to the Peace*

The two disciples told what had happened on the road to Emmaus,  
and how Jesus had been made known to them in the  
breaking of the bread. Alleluia.

The peace of the Lord be always with you  
**All And also with you**

*Blessing*

God the Father,  
by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead,  
strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life;  
and the blessing ...

*Final hymn – Will you come and follow me*

Will you come and follow me  
if I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don't know  
and never be the same?  
Will you let my love be shown,  
will you let my name be known,  
will you let my life be grown  
in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind  
if I but call your name?  
Will you care for cruel and kind  
and never be the same?  
Will you risk the hostile stare  
should your life attract or scare?  
Will you let me answer prayer  
in you and you in me?

Will you love the ‘you’ you hide  
if I but call your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside  
and never be the same?  
Will you use the faith you’ve found  
to reshape the world around  
through my sight and touch and sound  
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true  
when you but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you  
and never be the same.  
In your company I’ll go  
where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I’ll move and live and grow  
in you and you in me