

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

1 Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

The other day I was in St James church seeing to something or other when, as often happens, someone came in as they wanted to spend some time in quiet and prayer.

I had a chat with them and we sat and prayed about the matter that was troubling them. They then talked to me a little about their own faith journey, and in particular how important it had been for them to walk the Camino pilgrimage some years before. They talked about the people they had met and how sharing the walk with them had made all the difference. These people had made it feel as if it were Jesus himself walking alongside them – and they now rejoiced that they had, in these people they had met, friends all over the world.

I have never walked the Camino, but I have experienced the kind of companionship they were talking about. And it doesn't have to be on a pilgrimage to Spain, or even on some other kind of pilgrimage or even a walking holiday. It can happen anywhere at anytime. For me, for example, it has happened in the past on the Parish Boundary Walk – something we will be doing again on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> May. Walking and talking. Spending time with each other. Barriers seem to get broken down so easily. Conversation flows.

And it may not be while walking. a couple of weeks ago I spent an afternoon assembling IKEA wardrobes with my son-in-law. We had some quite deep conversations as we worked together. And its this kind of thing that's behind things like knit and natter groups, and sewing bees.

In our gospel reading we have the story of an ordinary walk. For Cleopas and his companion – quite likely to be his wife – two followers of Jesus - this everyday walk home from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus turned out to be the most amazing encounter with Jesus that they had ever known. – but I am rushing ahead with the story.

so – back to the setting for the story. It's Sunday - what we now know as Easter Sunday.

Just 2 days earlier Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified.

His followers were totally dejected. They had hoped for so much. And now it all seemed to be over. What was there left for them now? What meaning could life have now this hope had been extinguished.

But it wasn't just Jesus' death that troubled them. Now, 2 days later, there were stories, rumours of him being alive again. Tales of angels and an empty tomb. Tales of messages from the angels that were hard to believe. They couldn't make any sense of anything.

And so on this Sunday evening our two companions left the other followers of Jesus in Jerusalem and headed home.

On the way they were talking to each other, trying to piece it all together; trying to make some sense out of it all. Why? Why had God allowed this to happen? What about all their hopes and dreams? Had it all been a complete waste of time?

And as they walked, as they talked, they were joined by a stranger.

He couldn't help but hear their conversation. Perhaps in these dangerous times when any follower of Jesus might be the next person to be arrested they should have been more careful. Perhaps they didn't realise he could overhear them until it was too late. But it was soon apparent he had heard a lot of what they were talking about.

"What's all this you are talking about" he asked.

Cleopas commented that he must be the only person in Jerusalem who wasn't aware of what was going on. And he told the stranger the whole story. Perhaps he was rather rash, but somehow he couldn't help it. By his manner the stranger gave him the confidence and the freedom to open up to him – so he did. He finished by saying that he and the others had placed their hope in this Jesus – they thought he would be the one who would bring people back to God. But now ....it was all over.

The stranger then proceeded to explain the scriptures; he looked at the whole Bible (what we know as the OT) and pointed out how what had happened to Jesus was actually all there. The Messiah – which is who Cleopas and the others believed that Jesus was – was always going to be the one who would suffer, who would be rejected, would die on the cross and would rise again. The mysteries of the opposition from the religious leaders, his betrayal by a friend, his apparent rejection by the nation were all there.

Cleopas and his companion were enthralled. The things that the stranger was saying were music to their ears. Things were beginning to make some kind of sense. How was it that they couldn't see all this before. Had they been so caught up in the excitement that Jesus has caused they had failed to see the whole truth?

And now they were almost home. The walk had gone by in a flash. As they reached their house, the stranger made as if to carry on. They insisted he stay with them, they wanted to hear more.

So they went into the house, and sat down for a meal. It was then that their eyes were opened. The way he broke the bread – it was the action they had seen at countless mealtimes before when Jesus had been with them. Then they looked at his hands, marked with the scars of the nails. There could be no doubt. It was him! He really was alive! But as soon as they had realised - he disappeared.

They stared at each other in wonder and amazement. Didn't our hearts burn within us as he was talking and explaining the scriptures? They knew they had no option but to rush back to Jerusalem. Never mind that it was getting dark; never mind they had 7 miles to go to get there. They had to go and tell the others. This was the very best of good news!

Now I am not for one moment saying that the encounters we have as we walk and talk will be like that. Jesus himself will not, I guess, appear alongside us in that kind of way. But we will see and hear Jesus in the presence and the words of others as they listen to our stories, as they tell their own stories, as we share concerns and hopes, joys and sorrows. As we talk about our faith journeys, as we ask the questions which trouble us and concern us. We will know the presence of Jesus alongside us as we walk and talk together.

Maybe we won't always recognise Jesus in that other person straight away. As we were saying a couple of weeks back on Easter Day, we need to keep our eyes open and then we will be more likely to recognise his presence .

And of course it may be that we are the one who brings that presence of Jesus to someone else. As we walk we could be the one who listens and encourages and points in the right direction. We could be the answer to someone else's prayer. We could be the medium through which Jesus speaks

Perhaps as we think back we can recall times when we've had those kind of conversations. Where Jesus has met us on the road. We can thank him for them. Maybe too we can think of things we would want to ask Jesus if we did meet him on the road. We can pray that we have that opportunity. Maybe we just need to keep our eyes and ears open to recognise him when he's there.

But we also have an opportunity to do that now ...