

Homily for Easter 3

Revd. Alison Tyler

23 April 2023

We may be on the 3rd Sunday of the Easter season, but in our Gospel reading we are still with Luke at that first Easter, and the two disillusioned and dispirited people journeying to Emmaus on the evening of the first Easter day.

Peter preaching in our reading from Acts is ahead already at Pentecost and the writer of 1 Peter is about 60 years further ahead of that, both give us glimpses of what is to come following the resurrection of Jesus.

The story in Luke begins with two of Jesus' disciples on the road between Jerusalem and Emmaus. One is named Cleopas; the other one is not named and it could be anyone - I have more than once on retreat inserted my own name there as a way of gaining understanding and fresh insight into the story - but it could have been Cleopas' wife perhaps, his brother or just a friend, They are talking about the news, just as we all do today, the bad news from Jerusalem Jesus' arrest, torture, crucifixion, and death.

They are talking about hope that didn't materialize, and expectations not met. They are disappointed and sad. They had hoped that Jesus was the one, the Messiah, who would save Israel but he's dead and there's a part of them that died with him. They had heard rumours that he was alive, but it all sounded like an "idle tale". There was nothing to keep them in Jerusalem, so they are going to Emmaus, to seek the possibility perhaps of safety in the dangerous times ahead, or to find restoration in a change of location, or maybe going home to a place known and loved. Their hopes and lives had been shattered, so maybe they no longer care where they spend their time.

All these are possibilities within the story that Luke has given to us.

It is no accident that the first place the Risen Jesus shows up in Luke's gospel is on a road. Journeying is a major feature of Luke's writing in the Gospel and in the book of Acts. Repeatedly, Jesus meets people along the road: the middle section of the gospel, 10 Chapters of it, is all structured around Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, St Paul, later on, in Acts encounters Jesus on the road when he is travelling from Jerusalem to Damascus. Luke's focus on travel—both literal and figurative—serves as a good metaphor for discipleship, following in Jesus' footsteps and on the way, discovering new things about Jesus or about the faith, and we still say today that we are on the journey of faith.

Rarely does the gospel tell us exactly what to do or believe. so the road to Emmaus story, doesn't give us many answers, it's more like food for thought and exploration. We all want to know why they were going to Emmaus, to hear more about their experiences in Jerusalem during Holy week, or to hear how Jesus explained the scriptures and what else he said to them on that journey. We want to know how it was they failed to recognise him; they were probably too wrapped up in misery to

notice much, but the story says they were kept from recognising them, but how? The story raises questions and invites reflection. There are gaps within it for us to find or to recognise ourselves on a journey. It is a story of both shattering and restoration. Those disciples were changed on their journey, from broken shattered people into restored disciples and they were challenged into growth and new life by the risen Christ on that journey to Emmaus.

Jesus apparently finds them in the middle of a heated discussion – almost a row - they were on their way to Emmaus talking together after the shattering experiences and disappointments of Holy Week– and the language, the Greek words, Luke uses to describe the conversation escalates in its intensity - it starts as conversing, then conversing with debating, then talking but fiercely, so even more heatedly. Then Jesus intervened and explained the scriptures about himself, and showed them how what had happened was God's will and that God had glorious plan in hand for all of humanity.

When Jesus asked them what they were arguing about or discussing on their way to Emmaus, they stood still and sad, BUT after hearing his explanations, on their way back to Jerusalem they ran and spoke excitedly of how their hearts burned within them.

The risen Christ had stepped into the middle of their discussions and moved them on, resolved their difficulties so that they were transformed from being sullen and disappointed people into those who were suddenly seeing clearly just who Jesus is and what he had done for them, they were restored, hope and faith renewed, and full of energy and enthusiasm.

Jesus was not obviously sympathetic when they met him, they did not recognise him, nor did they understand how he seemed not to know of his own death, then he told them they were foolish and slow of heart because they did not understand the teachings of the prophets and the words of scripture. He opens the scriptures and explains to them God's plans and intentions.

The risen Christ brings into their discussion just the right kind of fresh understanding or conflict resolution or clear thinking and direction that all communities need, not just our own local communities, but nationally and globally as well, where vision, truthfulness and resolution are needed so is the presence of the risen Christ, to transform brokenness, to bring wisdom into lack of understanding and misery, and transform them into joyful enthusiasm and new life.

Then as they arrive at Emmaus, Jesus makes as if to keep travelling on, so they offer him hospitality for the night, and while he was with them at the table, he took the bread and said the blessing, then broke it and handed it to them.

And their eyes were opened and they recognised Jesus. They recognized him as the one they had left dead in Jerusalem. They recognized him as the one who had just accompanied them on the road to Emmaus. They recognized him as the one they had hoped he would be.

Jesus fed them, as he feeds us week by week, not just with bread but with himself: with his body, his life, his love, his compassion, his forgiveness, and his hope, with

all that he is and all that he has. Their life was fully restored. But as soon as they saw and recognized Jesus “he vanished from their sight.” And they almost immediately turned round and went back to Jerusalem to share the good news.

The action of God is hidden in plain sight, it was there to be found in the teachings of scripture, but because it is so different to what they or we are expecting they have had to have the scriptures broken open and explained to them, and ultimately they needed to share in the bread being broken in order to see and recognise who it was they were seeing.

And so do we, we still continually need to return to the scriptures and have them explained again, and to the table where the bread is broken, just to make sure that we remember and recognise the action of God with us, and his presence with us in the breaking of the bread. This is where our faith is sustained, in word and sacrament. It is the place where Jesus meets us and continues to reveal himself in the scriptures and in the breaking of the bread.

When we're frustrated, and we often are, and discouraged and don't recognise God's presence that's exactly where we need to be and to focus – on the Scriptures telling us how he rose again from the dead and is present with us in the breaking of the bread.

Alleluia Christ is Risen – He is risen indeed Alleluia