

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April

Acts 2 14a 36-41, Luke 24 13-35, Psalm 116 1-4 12-19

The Third Sunday of Easter

Have you noticed that it is easier to have a difficult conversation if you are walking or sitting beside someone rather than facing them?

The most informative and helpful conversations I had with George and Kate were either in the car as I was driving them somewhere or walking the dog. There is something less confrontational about it, more relaxed somehow. Maybe it is because we don't want to see the expression on someone's face when we tell them something we know they won't want to hear. Maybe it is because we don't want to see the disappointment when we know we've let them down or maybe it's because by spending time together on a walk we actually have time to listen and to hear what the other person has to say without distractions.

Ironically, in a time when most people are craving time with others I am really enjoying my solitary walks with the dog as it gives me some time on my own, time that until lockdown I hadn't realised how much I needed!

This year, more than ever, I feel that this reading from Luke about the road to Emmaus has more resonance than usual. As we journey away from an Easter like no other, you may be questioning what is going on and why it is happening.

The couple, who some believe to be Cleopas and his wife Mary, were discussing the events of the previous few days. I don't think that would have been unusual, if they had both been there to see the events unfold they probably felt they needed to discuss it to try and make sense of it.

When Jesus appears alongside them and asks them what they were talking about, they may have wondered if he was a spy, who would report them to authorities. However, either they decided they weren't bothered about it or there was something about the man that just made them feel relaxed enough to open up to him – even if Cleopas was clearly a little irritated to begin with. To him it must have seemed impossible that Jesus couldn't know what had happened. If it had happened today it would have been trending on twitter!

So where had this man been to have managed to miss everything that had gone on. It's clear in their conversation that Cleopas and his walking partner were angry and frustrated. This Jesus hadn't done what they expected him to do and now they were all at a loss as to what to do next? Sound familiar? We have access to news 24/7 but that doesn't mean that we have all the answers that we need – in fact I would probably say it's the complete opposite – we don't have one clear answer because we are given conflicting advice. Except of course I can categorically say that injecting yourself with disinfectant is definitely not to be advised!

The couple's hopes are voiced in verse 21: "... we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel..." Had hoped. They had invested their hopes in Jesus, but he was not who they had hoped he would be. Jesus response, however, outlines for them the meaning and significance of his own death, starting from Moses and the prophets. It was "necessary" that Jesus suffer, die, rise, and be lifted up into "glory."

As they approach their destination, the two disciples notice that Jesus seems to be planning to keep walking. They ask Jesus to stay with them and they offer hospitality to one whom they believe is a stranger.

But as soon as the table is set, Jesus upends the expected social roles – no change there, and he becomes the host by blessing the bread and sharing it.

Of course at this stage they still don't know that they are dining with Jesus once again; they don't realize that their dashed hopes are restored in the resurrected body of this "stranger."

But when Jesus does the most Jesus thing of all, everything changes.

I wonder, what for you is the most characteristic activity of Jesus. When you imagine Jesus, what is he doing? Is he on the cross? Preaching to a crowd? Maybe he's healing the sick with the touch of his hands.

For Luke, Jesus is most Jesus at an ordinary meal being shared with many, disciples, tax collectors, rich and poor. All were and are welcome at his table.

It wasn't in his teaching, it wasn't in his company, it was his sharing of bread with his friends and his blessing of the food that opened their eyes as to who they were eating with.

As we all walk this unusual journey from Easter this year may we take this opportunity to slow down our walk, to invite Jesus to walk alongside us as we share all our hopes, our worries and our fears. Allow time to listen to his response to you.

And whilst we all miss being able to share in communion together, maybe take a moment each time you eat a meal to invite Jesus to eat with you, to give thanks for the food on your table and to acknowledge his presence with you.

Amen