

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Easter 3

Collect:

Almighty God who in your great mercy, gladdened the disciples with the sight of the risen Lord:

Give us such knowledge of his presence with us, that we may be sustained by his risen life, and serve you continually in righteousness and truth;

Through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever,
Amen

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Acts 2:14a 36-41

Psalm 116: 1-3. 10-17

1Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

In writing and reading may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Today we move to Luke's gospel and are given a resurrection story that only he fully records. It takes us back to Easter Day and helps us share in the experience of two disciples in their immediate reactions to the series of events and reports that had taken place in their lives over the last few days.

This is one of the resurrection appearances that I enjoy exploring most. As I come to this year I am conscious that I would usually preach with a focus on the later part of the story, when Jesus is recognised in the breaking of the bread. Today I am not preaching at a gathering where we will share the experience of Jesus' presence in the breaking of bread and sharing of wine. Like many of you I am sure, I yearn for the day when we will bring this year's Easter journey to fulfilment in the celebration of the Eucharist together, but for now we are on the road in small household groups, or alone and the great gift of this story is that Jesus comes alongside the dejected disciples on the road, and is

as present to them there as he is at the supper. They just need his help to notice that presence.

Today then, is a time for focusing on his presence with them on the road, with the prayer that it will help us each notice his presence with us now, allowing the sharing of his presence with us bridge the distance between us, and open our hearts to recognise the spiritual communion we share with God and in Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit with each other.

We can imagine the two disciples, heading away from Jerusalem with so much on their minds, and so many emotions churning. Their world had been changed over such a short period of time – first perhaps by meeting and hoping in Jesus; then in the sorrow and fear of Good Friday, and now the utter confusion of reports that the tomb was empty all in the space of a few days.

I wonder how much we have in common with them; or how much we can see people around us, or those across our nation and worlds whose stories we know or can guess at, experiencing a similar mixture of thoughts and emotion.

I wonder too, if one of the reasons for setting out for Emmaus was that at least in the walking they had space and time to sift out all that they were trying to make sense of. They were certainly earnestly talking and discussing about all that had happened.

And as they walked, Jesus came alongside them.

Quite simply, he asked them what they were talking about.

The simple question prompted deep emotion: "They stood still, looking sad"

His question helped them stop and find the deepest feeling at the heart of all their talking.

Then, surprise, that this stranger didn't seem to know about all the things that had happened.

Jesus again asks a question that helps them stay focused on what they have experienced:

"What things?"

And they tell the story of all they have experienced – both the events and what they thought and felt about them – in their journey with Jesus prior to this day.

Jesus' question helps them look back at their own experience of the events they have lived through:

Jesus' miracles and teaching marking him out as a prophet mighty in word and deed

The actions of the religious leaders in handing him over to the romans to be crucified

Their dashed hopes that he was to have redeemed Israel

The astounding report of the women who had been at the tomb and seen angels telling them he was alive.

The testimony of other disciples that confirmed the women's report in all respects, except "they did not see Jesus"

The grief of the final line "they did not see Jesus" hangs heavy.

They have told their story.

Then it is Jesus' turn.

He takes the story and uses all that they already know about God in the words of scripture to show them how what they have lived through reveals God's glory in Jesus anew.

As he retells the story, there is clearly something compelling about it. As they reach Emmaus they invite him to "stay with us". There is something important about his presence and the new version of their own story as he tells it, the version of their story which helps them see more fully where God is in it.

The version of their story that helps them see where God is in it.

At this time when we are living through events that have changed things very quickly, when each of us may be experiencing those changes and challenges very differently from each other, or from the ways reported in national media, I wonder if the way Jesus comes alongside the two disciples may help us notice ways in which our faith can support us.

He offers them time and space to become quite clear about how they are feeling, what they have lived through and what they believe about it all.

Then in turn, they give him the time and space to help them see God's presence in it all. He shows them their story in relation to God, their gospel story, the good news of all they have experienced. He does not change the moments of pain or confusion, or grief as they were and are lived, but he helps them see God's presence in the whole story.

Listening to Jesus' version of their story gives them a new awareness of the joy of his presence, and leads to full recognition of him in the breaking of the bread, and the desire to share all this with their friends back in Jerusalem.

The energy with which they return is so different from the mood of their earlier journey.

One of the suggestions I made at the beginning of this period was that the Examen prayer was a good way of helping us notice where we were close to God in our daily lives. It has a very similar pattern to this story: we ask Jesus to show us what we need to see about our own experience and then we recall our day, letting God show us what we need to see was really important. I'll include the guide for this kind of prayer with this email again.

We can do this for longer periods of time, perhaps even our own life story. An exercise often offered on retreat is just such a reflection. You might draw your life on a piece of paper as a winding road, or a meandering river, or just as a line. Then mark on it milestones who help you keep track of what happened when. Then you might want to fill in times of particular emotion or significance.

Then I suggest you read this gospel passage again.

Then ask Jesus to show you the places of God's particular presence in your own life – his version of your story that helps you see where God is in it.

Then take some quiet time looking back over your life with Jesus and mark on your life map places where you felt particularly alive,

calm, loving, or which you now feel gratitude for (these may be the challenging times as well as the more obviously happy times). You may want to spend some time talking to God as you would to a friend about what you have noticed; you may be moved to give thanks, or to ask for God's help in being aware of his presence with you in these times, drawing the time to a close with the prayer of the disciples:

Stay with us Lord. Amen.

Ever present God, Be our comfort in times of uncertainty, our stability in times of change, our peace through anxiety, our companion in all things. Amen