

A Service for the Third Sunday of Easter, 26 April 2020 – Dean Sarah

On Sunday mornings after Easter when the BBC1 Sunday Worship Service does not come from St Davids Cathedral (the next are on May 17 and June 7), the clergy team will take turns to produce a short service of reading, reflection and prayers, which will be posted on YouTube and social media. They will also produce a written summary of the service, which can be shared with those who don't have access to the internet. Here is an edited version of the first of these Services, led by Dean Sarah.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Today is the Third Sunday of Easter, when we read St Luke's account of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. We'll find parallels for ourselves with how the risen Christ walked with the disciples in their disappointment, then taught them to understand God's salvation in new ways that helped them go forwards in faith and joy.

We begin with a simple prayer of confession, asking for God's cleansing and forgiveness, so we may be ready to hear and receive all he has for us in this time together:

Most merciful God,
we confess to you, before the whole company of heaven and one another,
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed, and in what we have failed to do.
Forgive us our sins, heal us by your Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen.

We also pray the Collect for today:

Almighty Father,
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 strengthened and sustained by his risen life
and serve you continually in righteousness and truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, Amen.

Our reading is from the Gospel According to St Luke, Chapter 24, verses 13 to 35. As it's rather a long passage, I'm going to take it in chunks! It's set on the day of the resurrection.

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.’

Here we have the two disciples, Cleopas and his companion who is unnamed – maybe his wife, or a friend – perhaps the anonymity is an invitation to place ourselves alongside Cleopas in this story, when we find ourselves in a similar situation. The two of them had been at the heart of the activity, with all sorts of hopes and expectations. But now nothing that they had been planning seems to have a future. And so they are walking away, retreating, and as they go they express their sorrow, disappointment, and lack of understanding how these things could have happened, even considerable frustration.

I suspect that there are a lot of commonalities with many of us, and our frustrations, as we cannot get on with what we had expected – whether in the realm of faith expressed in worship, or in the way that God touches us outside of our Sunday lives, being always there, whatever we are doing, always present with us.

Jesus comes close, alongside them. What he does first is listen, letting them recount the story of what they have been through and what they are experiencing in their own words; to express the impact it has had on them, and how they are feeling. And so they tell him. We too can talk to Jesus about how we feel, how life is treating us, the frustrations of where we are, how we just don’t know what is going to happen next or when. Perhaps we also have a huge disappointment about hopes that now will never be fulfilled.

What does Jesus do next?

Then Jesus 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.

Jesus teaches them. He tells them the whole story of God’s purposes of salvation through history, and how he is central to it all. He reweaves eternal truths to draw in what they have been experiencing. They are listening, they are learning, but still the penny has not quite dropped. They are not ready for that yet. Yet this is an assurance to us, that even as we go through the difficult journey of staying at home to keep safe and keep others safe, Jesus is not only listening, but actually is with us, to teach us: to teach our minds, hearts, and innermost spirits, how his salvation – his redeeming love, all that the Easter message is

about, all that he has done for us through cross and resurrection – is relevant to what we are experiencing now. That redeeming love is at work around us, within us, for whatever will happen next on our journey.

So, what happened next to those two on the road to Emmaus?

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.

The time came for them to stop their journey, to halt and stay put. They then did that ordinary everyday, yet so often sacramental, act of sitting down and eating a meal, Jesus with them. Suddenly they realise that he is present. They recognise he is the one feeding them, spiritually as well as taking bread and breaking it. Perhaps they had been present at the Last Supper and watched Jesus, or perhaps others had told them how he had taken bread and wine and blessed it, giving thanks and saying, ‘This is my body, broken for you, my blood shed for you.’ Perhaps they had suddenly realised that in and through suffering Jesus is most present; and that even when we are not suffering, we can still know that in our best and worst experiences, he is utterly with us, his redeeming love desiring to bring fruitfulness and blessing in whatever we’re facing. Perhaps they suddenly saw the story they had been telling about how God’s salvation works wasn’t quite right, and that Jesus – through cross and resurrection – is the answer, the key, the lens, through which God’s redeeming purposes make sense and comes to fruition in every part of our lives.

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.

They rushed back to where they were before – but it was not the same as before. Everything had been changed by encounter with the risen Jesus! When we get back to where we were before, we’re also bound to find that much has changed. And the fundamental change is this: through the time since we were last together, Jesus has been with each of us, and Jesus has been teaching all of us what resurrection means in these new circumstances. So when we are once again together, sharing the broken bread and wine poured out, we can be certain that there will be new lessons we have each learnt that we can share with one another. So we shall not just pick up where we left off, but we will go forward together refreshed not only with the renewal of Easter Sunday a fortnight ago, but

also with a sense of the fullness of Easter that is always woven into every moment of every day, when we put our hand in the hand of Jesus and walk with him.

So may we have eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts and minds truly to listen and learn, so that when we come back together we will each be able to say, 'This is how Jesus met me on my journeying. Alleluia, he is risen indeed! Amen!'

Let us pray, gweddiwn:

Risen Lord, you set ablaze the hearts of your disciples with awe and wonder at your resurrection. Open the eyes of your Church – of us, your people – to this astounding news, and fill our hearts and voices with joy that you are risen indeed.

Risen Lord, you see and judge the motives of rulers and leaders. Raise up and sustain with you Holy Spirit people of integrity for the responsibilities of government and leadership, especially in the terrible challenges of the coronavirus. Bring peace and justice to flourish.

Risen Lord, you drew alongside confused disciples as they journeyed to Emmaus. Give grace to all who accompany others in their searching. Help us all to be good neighbours, so we can be together in your love even when we are physically apart.

Risen Lord, you incline your ear to all who call on you. Come close to all who suffer, and especially to everyone affected directly or indirectly by Covid-19. Make your healing, comforting, strengthening presence known to each one of us.

Risen Lord, you came to your disciples in the darkness and impaired vision of their grief. Come close to all whose hearts are anguished by fear, loss and death. And bring us all to rejoice in your eternal Kingdom.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers, for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

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 of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. Amen.

Bydded i Dduw'r Tad, y cyfodwyd Crist oddi wrth y meirw trwy ei ogoniant, eich cryfhau i rodio gydag ef yn ei fywyd atgyfodedig, a bendith Duw hollalluog, y Tad, y Mab a'r Ysbryd Glân a fo yn eich plith ac a drigo gyda chwi yn wastad.