

The Emmaus Story – Luke 24: 13-35 – April 26th 2020

Over the last few weeks we have listened to Gospel writers Matthew (Mary at the tomb) and John (Jesus saying Peace be with you in the locked room) those both being the events of Easter Day in Jerusalem. Today we hear from Luke, and yes, we are still listening to the events of Easter day – it is perhaps early or late afternoon.

What would Jerusalem have been like that day? – after all it was the Feast of the Passover a time of celebration commemorating the story of the Israelites' departure from ancient Egypt – the city during Passover may have been swelling by six times its normal population but what had happened around Good Friday had changed the tone of those celebrations for many – things were not the same, things were not normal – maybe that rings bells with our World and national situation today.

Our Emmaus story centres on two disciples Cleopas and one other deciding to get out of town, get away from things and head out to Emmaus. They chat about the events of the last days, just like I chat with my pal Barry when we walk around Pitsford reservoir – strangely that's about the same distance as Cleopas and friend were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus – about 7 miles.

A stranger to them comes along side and joins in the conversation and reminds them of Jewish history by expounding scripture, especially the records of the prophets.



Arriving in Emmaus Cleopas and friend extend hospitality to their stranger – the identity of whom is finally revealed in the breaking of bread. Jesus vanishes - but filled with excitement, filled with understanding and filled with a desire to tell others they zoom off back to Jerusalem. – Excuse the pun.



Jesus and the two disciples
On the Road to Emmaus, by
Duccio, 1308–1311, Museo
dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena

Like many Gospel writings The Emmaus story doesn't give us answers but it certainly raises questions and invites reflection.

The disciples were devastated by the events of the last few days – has your life ever been devastated – then this story is for you. Hopefully your life has been restored – then this is a story for you; and if you ever find yourself between devastation and restoration – this is certainly a story for you.

We hear today about a journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus and a journey back to Jerusalem. I think it is a journey you and I have taken or indeed may take in the future and it may well be a journey we take more than once in our life.

I am not talking about a tour within the Holy Land such as we travelled to geographical Emmaus from geographical Jerusalem on our way back to Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv – no I speak of the way in which we are taken on this great journey this great journey of life.

Cleopas and his companion felt they had to get away, flee from the disappointment of Good Friday - I guess at some time you have had upsets to the pattern of your life, been disappointed, had expectations not realised,

witnessed death of loved ones, felt lost, felt lonely, had uncertainty surround you. The road to Emmaus was Cleopas's escape – Emmaus may have been - may at sometime in the future be OUR escape from devastation. For my walking pal Barry it was the death of his wife due to Motor Neurone Disease that started our regular 7 mile walks, his time of finding some peace after devastation - with someone at his side.

So, as we walk that road there is someone at OUR side – we probably do not recognise it – in just the same way as Cleopas did not recognise Jesus. And it is Jesus at OUR side too. As they reach their first destination of Emmaus they invite the stranger in – it reminds me – if you know the Holman Hunt painting where Jesus waits outside the door – waiting to be invited in.

And when we invite him in, wholeheartedly, when we share with him - OUR life is restored. The risen Jesus is alive, alive in our hearts and alive in our innermost being. In that breaking of bread we too like Cleopas, encounter the risen Jesus.

Cleopas and companion return to Jerusalem, Jerusalem the city. We too, when we have Jesus within us, can safely return to Jerusalem, the spiritual Jerusalem, to face the devastations, the loneliness, the unachieved expectations. From Jerusalem TO Jerusalem - The place we left and to the place where we return, the place has not changed but we have changed – we have been restored as a result of OUR encounter with the risen Jesus.

AMEN