

## Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April

### Sermon by Reverend Peter Lyth

#### A prayer of praise

Lord, you have always been our host.

When you first came from heaven to the world we call ours, shepherds and kings were your guests.

When you accepted hospitality in the homes of others, you turned the tables and became the host, feeding hearts and souls through your teaching.

When you came to the disciples, newly risen, you took charge and saw to their needs of mind and body.

We praise you, Jesus, ground of our being, ground of our believing, for standing among us in your risen power, host to the world that is yours – not ours. Amen.

#### **Reading:** Luke Chapter 24 verses 13-35

In the weekend paper, there was an article detailing various walks that one could go on during the holiday period. One was in the Lake District, another in Norfolk, they were dotted all over the country. Some were in dramatic scenery that demanded some hill climbing skills, others were classed as “easy” and were on the flat. Each provided an opportunity to get out into the open, away from home (but not too far). Hopefully one could socially distance from all the other “Times” readers who were also acting in response to the article! But walking is a basic activity where one can commune with nature and, if one has a travelling companion, one can spend the time in conversation or in companionable silence.

Two thousand years ago, two men were walking along the road to Emmaus. One was called Cleopas, the other is not named by Luke. However, neither is numbered amongst the twelve. They are part of the extended group of people that followed Jesus in Jerusalem. You can imagine that the conversation was downbeat. They had seen their leader, the person in whom they had placed their trust, the man who inspired them put to death by the Romans in collusion with the religious authorities. Whatever they had thought would be the end-game of Jesus’ ministry, this did not feature. In that weekend, their world had been turned upside down and their hopes were dashed.

Whilst they were walking along, they were joined by someone they thought to be a stranger. Of course, we read the passage with the benefit of hindsight and so it seems obvious to us who the stranger is – after all many of us are armed with a multitude of post-Easter sermons

and Luke places this incident amongst the hints of the risen Christ. But for those men then, this would be unprecedented. The events of the last few days are in the forefront of their conversation as they walk (or probably, with their body language showing their despondency they trudged). There was also the mystery of what had happened to the body of Jesus. This was a Passover like no other.

As they are joined by this stranger, he asks them, “What are you discussing?” – the Greek can be literally, “What are these words that you have been pitching back and forth to each other?” Quite clearly the events had dominated the conversations in Jerusalem – so much so that Cleopas is incredulous that the stranger doesn’t know what went on and the two are literally stopped in their tracks. However it soon becomes clear that the balance of knowledge and understanding shifts. Cleopas, who thought he knew what was going on, clearly did not whereas the stranger who feigned ignorance went on to explain the significance of what had happened in relation to the scriptures. Like the Scribes and Pharisees whom Nigel drew attention to on Good Friday, they did not understand the implication of the scriptures.

As the stranger takes over the conversation and interprets the scriptures for them, he points out how the events of the last few days are the fulfilment of scripture. This resonates with them, as Luke puts it, “were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”. Many years later, in 1738 in fact, when John Wesley was attending (somewhat unwillingly) a Moravian Religious Society meeting on Aldersgate Street in London, he suddenly felt his heart “strangely warmed” as he felt God in a personal and life giving way. Until then, he reacted to God in an intellectualised fashion and really this was his conversion moment. The Sunday is commemorated in the Methodist Church on the Sunday closest to 24<sup>th</sup> May as “Aldersgate Sunday”. It is this strange warming that shows the true presence of Christ – not in a head way but in a heart way. This is the sensation that the disciples felt at this moment.

Having persuaded him to stay for supper, he broke bread and began to give it to them – an action similar to the feeding of the 5,000 and the Last Supper. It was at this point that they recognised him and he disappeared from their sight leaving them excited and probably confused.

So what has this to tell us?

Firstly that the encounter took place, not in some kind of special event. Not in the Temple, or indeed in any kind of religious building, but instead alongside two friends as they walked, in despondent fashion along the road. Jesus appears in the relatively mundane and ordinary situations of our lives as we walk the road well trodden. Often we need to look up to see that we have a travelling companion – one that is Divine.

Secondly, Jesus takes any situation and makes it his own. As he walked along with the two disciples, he turned the conversation on its head. He recognised their confusion and opened up the scriptures to them. Later, as he was invited into their home in Emmaus, he took on the role of the host, breaking the bread and blessing it before distributing it. But it was not just about him. The disciples INVITED him into their conversation, they listened and again they INVITED him into their home. It is by giving God time, inviting him into our lives that we too can receive his transforming power. It is by keeping an open mind that God's word can bring understanding.

And finally, it was through what he did, opening the scriptures, breaking and sharing the bread, that they recognised the presence of Christ. These were characteristic acts – it was his actions that made his presence recognisable. As we in the church are the body of Christ in the world, it begs the question, how does the world recognise the presence of Christ through us and our actions? It is through us that we can bring a resurrection transformation to the world.

2,000 years ago, an encounter that seemed ordinary very quickly became extra-ordinary. We can still encounter Jesus in our lives now. He can still bring hope and transformation, even in the most ordinary of circumstances.

### **A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

God, we confess that when distress comes knocking at our door,  
all that we have learned and should know goes flying out of the window.

Our minds in disarray, we fail to turn to trusted sources of help.

Forgive us for forgetting how to seek you.

We forget your sustaining Word in Scripture, your presence when we turn to you in prayer,  
the calm that is to be found when we seek you in community.

We are sorry for turning in on ourselves, our minds going round in circles.

Come, risen Lord, break the cycle of our despair. Amen.

### **Assurance of forgiveness**

Our understanding is dark, clouded by dismay,

fearful and lacking in faith, yet we know that you will understand, Lord.

Shine your light on us and banish the dark thoughts that overwhelm us;

forgive us the deeds committed while fearful and bewildered,

and lead us forward in the light of your love. Amen.