

2023-04-23 ... 10am Morning Worship Sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; 1 Peter 1: 17-23; Luke 24: 13-35

One of the ways to study a bible passage is to read it slowly to really try and take in the whole atmosphere of what's going on. I so enjoyed doing that with this passage from Luke that I thought I would share some of my observations with you this morning. So many of the details translate into contemporary experience that time is truncated and it's as if we're talking about what happened just a couple of weeks ago.

On that same day the passage starts .... Jesus is dead, his friends have hung around through the Sabbath and Sunday brings the news that not only is Jesus dead but his body has gone missing.

In Luke's telling the women meet angels at the tomb but no-one else.

Missing but risen – they're probably wondering what on earth that means!

Two of them walking back to Emmaus – Cleopas and another – could be another man, could be a woman.

Talking and discussing – trying to work out what's happened, what's going to happen – feeling betrayed perhaps? Blaming each other for following Jesus in the first place and giving their old life up? We don't know, but we can imagine that the walk is an ideal time to talk it through – when our children were young and we didn't seem to see much of each other I used to be glad when we had a long car journey – my husband and I could finally catch up! No distractions, no (in those days!) phone calls.

But the two are joined by someone, someone who comes near. They are shocked by his question - they STOP! It is clear from what Cleopas says to the man that what has happened in Jerusalem has been big news. It's not been a story that has been life and death for just a few, it has been a headlining scandal. There is disgust at 'our' leaders. There is the huge disappointment that they had backed the wrong horse. There is the disbelief in the women's story about the angels but puzzlement about the missing body.

Who I wonder do the travelling pair think is talking to them – how do they take the comment that they're idiots? Did they listen? Did they interrupt with questions?

There is a lovely story to share from the good Friday Procession of Witness to illustrate the encounters and conversations that can happen on journeys: *Revd Donna from the Methodists overheard a young boy ask his Dad why the man was carrying a cross. Dad said he didn't know. Donna asked if he minded if she told the boy why ...*

It's interesting that when they came to turn in at Emmaus, Jesus – for you and I know that that is who it was – walked ahead as if he were going on. Jesus, God – for Jesus told us that we could know what God is like by knowing him – most often chooses to be invited in, he doesn't impose himself on people who don't want him around. He will draw near but he won't insist. Luckily for Cleopas and his friend, whether out of cultural politeness for hospitality or a desire to continue the conversation, that is what they do, they invite him in.

Then comes the wonderful moment of breaking the bread. At the Good Friday Procession of Witness again I looked across the circle and saw two young (I flatter them slightly but younger than me anyway) women, one of whom I knew. I wondered who the other was, when she just did something with her head, tilted it or something, and I knew absolutely who it was but a) I didn't expect to see her there and b) she'd changed her hairstyle.

And at that moment of recognition Jesus vanishes. It reminds me of the story of the banner down there – the Good Shepherd looking out. Behind him are the sheep who are safe, it's not them he's

paying attention to – he’s looking for those who need finding. It’s one of the reasons I like to hang it on the outside door sometimes.

The pair look at each other and ask if what they think just happened really happened – wasn’t there a special feeling going on whilst He was with them – perhaps you have known that fizzy feeling of connection with someone, even maybe with Jesus.

Full of excitement – but maybe also their supper because it doesn’t say they leave straight away but only ‘that same hour’ – they head back to Jerusalem – 7 miles in the dark. Sometimes – you’ve just got to share what you know – and this pair have friends who need to know that the angels (and the women) spoke the truth – Jesus is alive!

When they get to Jerusalem they find everyone is still up and together and it seems that Simon has seen Jesus too – Luke doesn’t give us any details of that story.

There’s a little bit in the next few verses which amuses me – Jesus turns up amongst them at this moment. He greets them, asks them why they’re startled and terrified, shows them his hands and feet – and then asks for food – it’s a hungry business being alive!

This encounter on the road to Emmaus is one we all want. One that answers all our questions about the meaning of life with one whose very presence is the evidence we need that death is not the end. If you’ve not had that encounter yet, then I encourage you to talk about what is puzzling you with someone walking the same way as you. It is Jesus’s habit to come near - be ready to extend an invitation to him to stay awhile.

If you’ve caught even a snippet of the truth, then don’t spend too long finishing your meal and let others know what you know and talk about it some more for both their sake and your sake.

As a meditation and I hope as a prayer that we can each claim for ourselves as a community the choir are going to stand and sing hymn 356 Jesus stand among us, at the meeting of our lives. Please stay seated but do join in with us ....

**Jesus stand among us at the meeting of our lives**

**be our sweet agreement at the meeting of our eyes.**

*O Jesus, we love you, so we gather here,*

*join our hearts in unity and take away our fear.*

**So to you we’re gath’ring out of each and ev’ry land,**

**Christ the love between us at the joining of our hands ... (chorus)**

**Jesus stand among us at the breaking of the bread;**

**Join us as one body as we worship you, our Head ... (chorus)**