

Reflection - Sunday 26th April 2020

Reading:- Luke: 24-13:35 - Road to Emmaus

Fliss to Read Passage

For many of us at the moment the only time that we leave our houses each day is to take a walk, I realise for some of you even that isn't possible. It's interesting to hear about the walks that people are taking and how far people are walking. If you're not careful it's easy to get competitive about how far you've walked, where you've got to and who you've seen on the way ... as an appropriate distance of course.

I wonder when you leave your house each day if you've worked out where you are going to walk to and how you are going to get there, or do you know where you are going but not sure the route you will take or maybe you head out and see where you end up? I guess for most of us there will be a mixture depending on the day and maybe what we need to do whilst we are on our walk.

Our Bible reading today is probably my favourite of the post Easter resurrection appearances, it's the story of the road to Emmaus and two of the disciples who go for a seven mile walk to Emmaus or more accurately two walks one there at a leisurely pace and a more speedy return.

It's my favourite resurrection appearance for three reasons: firstly because it's all so normal - there is nothing more normal than going for a walk, yet on this walk the two disciples are accompanied by Jesus, they don't realise it is Jesus but he is there. It reminds us that even when we don't recognise Jesus he is with us - something we may need to hear more than ever at this time of lockdown, of isolation, of global pandemic.

My second reason is because the conversation on the road is about God, the disciples talk with the stranger. They share and grapple and discuss the things of God, the stories of scripture, matters of faith and it is so normal for them to do so. It shows us that talking of God, talking of Jesus, talking of his death and resurrection can and should be that natural and normal for us to.

Thirdly, I love this passage because the moment the disciples acknowledge who Jesus is, is when he breaks the bread with them. As he breaks bread with them as he had done in the upper room just a few days earlier. The breaking of the bread - something we would all long to share at the moment - is what shows the two disciples who Jesus is and what he has done for them, to die and rise again. The breaking of the bread isn't just about the disciples understanding who Jesus is and what he has done though, the sharing of the bread leads them out from where they were going to stay for the night, back to Jerusalem to share the good news. When we share bread together as the Church it must never just be to celebrate who Jesus is and what he has done it must also be to nourish us for the journey, to send us out to share the Good News of Jesus.

It's normal, they walk and talk about Jesus and they break bread in which they see Jesus and speed back to Jerusalem to share the Good News that Jesus is risen. It's normal and that's part of why I love this passage so much, it's doesn't seem as unusual as Jesus walking through locked doors or

cooking fish for breakfast - I've never understood my Dad's love of kippers for breakfast, fish for breakfast is definitely not normal in my book.

Of course at the moment there is no sense of normal is there, everything that we call normal is no longer normal and the new normal we are each discovering, new rhythms of the day that we are finding are not what we want to become normal.

As I prepared this week the sense of everything being anything but normal made me look again at the passage, made me ask afresh what does this passage say to us as followers of Jesus, as those who proclaim Jesus is Risen but do so in a world that has changed completely in the last 3 months.

As I did this I was drawn to the last 3 verses of the passage, the end of the story:

³³They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

What happened when the two disciples and Jesus got to Emmaus changed everything for them, when they shared bread together and recognised who Jesus was they knew everything had changed, they knew Jesus was alive, they knew this was Good News to share. The plans they had, maybe what they had done before when they'd walked to Emmaus, a nice quiet night in an inn in Emmaus, maybe a few glasses of wine after the meal, some more good conversation and a good nights sleep, all went out of the window. Their encounter with Jesus changed everything. What they were able to do, what they had done before and what they choose to do are very different.

At the moment everything has changed for us in our lives but also in our life together as the Church. We are not meeting and worshipping as normal, we are on lockdown journey into the unknown, a lockdown journey where we are walking with Jesus as the two disciples were. At some point this particular lockdown journey that we are on will come to end, probably not all at the same point and even for the youngest, fittest and healthiest amongst us we don't know when. But there will be an end, there will be a moment when we reach the lockdown destination - the Emmaus of this particular journey.

At that point we will be able to change our plans, we will be able to go out more than once a day, gather together, go back to work, to school, to college, to restaurants. But there is of course a difference between what we will be able to do and what we will choose to do - just as there was for the disciples.

Here in verses 33 and 34 we are told what the disciples choose to do, *they got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen"*

What will we choose to do? Where will we choose to go?

I think this is why I was drawn to these verses. As a Church when we reach the destination of our lockdown we will be able to return to where we came from. We will be able to reopen the doors of our Churches again. When we do we have an opportunity like we've never had before, we have the opportunity to start afresh, to be different. In so many walks of life we long for day when we have a blank sheet of paper and we can start from scratch and that's exactly what we will have as the Church when this period of lockdown ends. What will we choose to do?

When we get to our destination and we are ready to return to where we came from, we will be able to choose where to go: we will be able to choose which parts of Church life we want to do differently, which parts of Church life we want to restart, which part of Church life we want to leave closed, to give thanks for but to recognise they are not part of who God calls us to be going forward.

The Church, our Church at Trinity, does many good and wonderful things but time and time again the Church has acknowledged we try and do too much. Some of what we do is because we've always done it but we know it doesn't make a difference for the Kingdom. Often we get caught up in busy and hurried lives which means we find ourselves saying to God I'm not sure how I can do what you call me to do.

When we get to lockdown Emmaus, when we reach our destination, we will have a choice as to what we do, how we do it, when we do it. We will have a chance to say these things have been good and we rejoice in them but they have had their day.

The Church in Britain has been in decline for many years, we know at Trinity we have been blessed by new people coming to faith, but we also know many people in our community have no interest in connecting with us. More widely the Church has not been operating in a way that has seen people come to know Jesus.

The world will not be the same after Coronavirus and it would be a tragedy if the one thing that went back to how it was before was the Church. Going back to what use to work with the hope by going back it will suddenly bring people to Jesus. As Justin Welby put it in a recent interview '*Least we forget and return to make fresh mistakes in old ways.*'

This gift of a blank sheet, of having the opportunity to decide what we do and don't do in the future is I believe a gift of God. It gives us one of the biggest opportunities we've ever had to reshape the Church, our local Church and the whole Church. It's the biggest opportunity we've had to give thanks for the past and to look to the future.

In this passage Luke records the disciples journey to Jerusalem in 20 verses, from verse 13 to verse 32, he records their return and action after they realise who Jesus is in just 3. Well and then the whole of the book of Acts, but come along on Tuesday to find out more about that!

I think this fact is really important to us at the moment. We know that the Church has been in the past, we know what we like, how we do things, what has worked, what doesn't work. We could talk about it for verses and verses and verses!

In contrast we don't yet know what the Church of the future should be like, we don't know how it should work or what it should do, how it should worship, how it should witness. I think these three verses tell us everything that we need to know when we get to our lockdown Emmaus. They tell us that we will have the opportunity to return to where we came from - to our going out, to our gathered worship, to our activities. But they tell us that when it comes to our choices of what we do, everything we choose to do needs to be built on just two things, proclaiming 'The Lord is Risen' and worshipping him and secondly telling 'what has happened on the way and how we recognised Jesus'.

Proclaiming Jesus is Risen, worshipping Jesus as Lord, sharing the testimony of how Jesus walks with us and inviting others to do the same. Those are the foundations on which the Church needs to be built and if you look they are at the heart of Trinity's vision statement.

I can't tell you when we will get to our Lockdown Emmaus, I can't tell you how quickly we will be able to reopen Trinity's doors.

But I can tell you, that just like the disciples walking to Emmaus Jesus is with us on our lockdown walk and I can tell you that we will get to the point where lockdowns end.

When we get there, we will be able to return to many things, we will be able to return to being a gathered Church but we will need to do so in a new and different way, we will need to do so in way which puts first and foremost proclaiming Jesus is risen and telling others what has happened on the way so they too can recognise Jesus.

Much that I like to have a plan, and don't you all know it! I cannot tell you what Trinity will look like as a Church in three or six months, in a years time. To have a plan would take verses and verses and here Luke gives us just three.

That doesn't mean I should be saving this reflection for our last Sunday before we can open the doors again. Like many other Church leaders I believe it is so important that this is said now, before we get complacent that we've worked out how to do lockdown Church and soon all will be back to normal.

In this time we have things to do so that we are ready for when we get to our lockdown Emmaus. As they walked to Emmaus the two disciples were talking of God, as Jesus came alongside them they searched the scriptures, they discussed what they knew of God, of the prophets, of what happened to Jesus. I have no doubt they discussed what life was going to be like now Jesus had been killed - what a joy that we don't have to worry about that.

Like the disciples on their walk to Emmaus, as we walk to our lockdown Emmaus we need to be attentive to the Jesus who walks with us, we need to be attentive to the Spirit of God at work in us, we need to be listening to what the spirit is saying and sharing that with one another.

To help us do this I think there are two questions which are really helpful to ask. Firstly, what is God showing us and teaching us during lockdown and secondly what are we not missing that we use

to do. I think the first will show us glimpses of what the future will be like and second helps us to recognise what we need to give thanks for but leave in the past.

I believe if we ask these questions, if we walk with Jesus, if we are attentive to the Spirit then as we are faithful to God, God will be faithful to us. I believe God will show us a new, a different, an exciting way to be the Church with the Good News of Jesus, the Good News of New Life, the Good News of Kingdom at the centre.

That doesn't mean it will be easy, I know just preparing for this reflection, has challenged me, frightened me, unsettled me, rattled me. But I do know through this horrid time of Coronavirus the Church of God is being given the biggest opportunity it has ever had and will ever have to reshape for the future. The opportunity to be different, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus and to see peoples lives transformed by God.

However challenging it might be I believe it will be a journey worth preparing for, a journey worth taking, a journey where my life, your life and the lives of many others will be transformed by Jesus, by the Jesus who is risen from the dead, who is alive and offers new life to all.

So will you continue to journey with God, with me, with each other? Will you be attentive to Jesus who is risen, will you share what Jesus is revealing to you at this time? Will you continue on the journey to lockdown Emmaus however long it takes us to get there and will you be ready to return with new and bold choices that help us to say to all the world Alleluia, Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!