

## Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> April A reflection on Luke 24:13-35 - Recognising Jesus

I had the privilege on Easter Sunday of opening up Immanuel Church once more, after some months of closure, for our celebration of Holy Communion. Afterwards, we cleansed our hands and dutifully filed out of Church without lingering too much of course. One worshipper met my gaze and with tears in her eyes said: "I'd forgotten how much I missed sharing communion with others over this past year. I must admit to coming over all emotional as I received the wafer!" On reflection, I think she spoke for us all, particularly as we start to emerge into this unknown territory of life coming out (we hope and pray) of this pandemic.

In our familiar gospel reading today we are reminded of Cleopas and a friend setting out into unknown territory on their journey to Emmaus with heavy hearts of sadness. Their steps are weighed heavy with the knowledge of the death of Jesus "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all people" who appears, to them, to have been defeated. They had hoped for a Messiah mighty with sword to rid their land from cruel and oppressive Roman occupation. "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" they almost whine to the stranger who walks beside them on the road to Emmaus. As Jane Williams reflects on this passage: "they weren't just mourning the loss of a friend in Jesus Christ...but the death of the dearest hope of a whole nation".

Despite Jesus going on to interpret all things about himself in all the scriptures they still don't recognise to whom they are speaking. "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory" Jesus asks them. No, still no hint of recognition! I must admit to not really understanding how the eyes of these two are, we are told, kept from recognising Jesus. The stop motion clay animated film "The Miracle Maker" (1999) makes a good stab at showing how this might have worked, as the face of this stranger metamorphoses, through clay modelling, into the face of how we might imagine Jesus looked as he breaks bread at supper. We don't of course know exactly what Jesus looked like and it may be that the two on the road to Emmaus might not have done either.

In any event it is not until Jesus comes to one of their homes and sits down to share an ordinary everyday meal at a table, that all is revealed. In a simple act with friends, Jesus took the bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them and there in that the metamorphosis is complete. That is where these followers recognise and meet Jesus in the midst of their fears, anxieties and despair. The scriptures burned in and lifted their hearts as they learned to step out in renewed life and joy to witness to the Risen Lord.

Perhaps there is a similarity to be drawn from this into our current situation. During this period of grappling with the Pandemic it has shown to me that we are not immune from the doubt and despair similar to that seen on the road to Emmaus. Each step forward and the odd glimmer of hope seems to be set back by another piece of "bad news". I must admit to days when reading the scriptures appears to bring me no closer to God. Prayers offered, seem to return again hollow and unanswered. Despite all of that, this passage serves to remind me, that Jesus still walks alongside us no matter what. We have a chance each day to look out for him and to recognise him, say, in everyday acts of kindness and generosity but now also in that simple act of Communion (even with current limitations) with others physically, as well spiritually too.

The feelings wrought by the taking communion on Easter Day remind us of the miracle of God's grace through that simple act of the breaking of bread with Christ. In that, we are lifted from our roads well-travelled, to the foot of the cross, where we can leave our troubles being transported to a new, resurrected life walking in the new covenant revealed through and in Jesus Christ. As Jane Williams suggests, it is at the Lord's table that we come to know that Jesus lives, not because some scholar tells us so, not because of rumours of resurrection appearances, not because of things that we might have done in his name, but because we meet him in the bread broken for us. That is what will sustain me, and I pray you, in the days, weeks and months ahead as, with courage and hope in our hearts, we walk the road, recognising Jesus Christ in step with us along the way.

**Frank.**