

SERMON on The Emmaus Road from Luke 24 - Sunday 26th April 2020

Well good morning!

For those who don't know me, I am Sarah Paxton and in my second year of training to be a lay minister in the Church of England and I worship here at St Peter's.

Well what an Easter season we have had haven't we. Sometimes it has felt all death and no resurrection this year.

It is an Easter like never before; one we will probably always remember.

- The Church locked. In the place we expect to meet Jesus he is not there.
- People fearful of going out
- People feeling a feeling of disorientation and loss.

Where is God? Where is Jesus in all this? Are we feeling abandoned?

Well guess what – in the last three weeks the gospel readings have very much reflected all of this.

We can understand why Mary was so distraught when she didn't find Jesus in the tomb. Her careful plans and those of the other women to prepare his body for embalming with spices were all gone to pieces. Jesus was not in that edifice; just as he was not in our church building. All our plans for a lovely Easter service in our church building were ruined. But instead the Easter message was **outside** this year. The Easter cross of flowers symbolising the new hope of resurrection was outside. For Mary, Jesus was in the garden; for us he was in out in the world - in our homes, in our communities, in the hands of those ministering to those suffering from Corona Virus.

And last week there were **locked doors**. The disciples were shut behind locked doors because of fear- fear not of the virus but of the people who might be seeking to kill them as well.

So how does this week's story speak to us in our situation.

The story is of two friends of Jesus walking back from Jerusalem to Emmaus where they lived, A distance of seven miles. They had been up to the Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and more than likely they had been there when Jesus had triumphantly entered that city on a donkey to huge acclaim and shouts of people crying hosanna, as they waved palm branches as if to greet a king. As if to greet a person who would redeem and save them from the brutality and oppression of the Roman occupying forces. A person who was foretold in the scriptures as one who would save them. But he was dead. One of their friends had betrayed Jesus and handed him over on Thursday evening to be tried. And he had died just two days ago. He had been crucified, hung on a cross and they knew from the women who

had stood at the foot of the cross what pain he had borne. One of those women may well have been the mother of one of them, and they knew he was dead. And they grieved.

But they had heard strange things this morning – those same women had been to the tomb and reported the tomb was empty. And they were so confused; disoriented; dejected. What did this mean? Was this another plot by the Romans to trap them. They had decided to leave the city and go home.

Yes they were feeling despondent and in grief.

Does that ring any bells this week? That feeling of confusion, despondency and grief?

I know this week has been hard for many of us and we feel guilty for feeling sorry for ourselves. We try to pray, and the words won't come.

Eleanor our lovely church warden posted a short video on our WhatsApp prayer group this week of a person writing a prayer on a board using those magnetic letters. Three times the person scrubbed out the prayer as they struggled for words. Finally, in despondency the person gave up and threw the letters in a heap. Slowly the words started to reform in front of them as a hand wrote these words ...

Dear Child

I know.

I love you.

(And it was signed from) God.

How does this relate to what Jesus did on the Emmaus Road?

What comfort can we take from the story?

Well FIRST he came alongside them as a stranger. He JOURNEYED with even though they didn't know it. Their Risen Lord was there with them. On THAT day, the day he rose from the dead he spent his afternoon and evening travelling the several hours that it took to get to Emmaus. He was with them and they didn't know it.

Secondly, he LISTENED. He let them pour out their story. He heard their bewilderment. He appreciated their loss. He felt their pain.

Next, he CHALLENGED them to remember what had been spoken before about him in the Scripture. He used scripture to prompt them to recall who he was – that Jesus was indeed the manifestation of God, God made man and the promised Messiah for all of us.

He was PATIENT and PERSISTENT. He waited until they got home, until they invited him in for a meal, until they were calm and resting and in their own space to reveal himself to them. It

was in their calm- in their home -that they noticed the way he broke the bread they had given him.

And their response was total joy. Jesus had met them in their home, and he was alive. And they ran – yes ran all the way back the seven miles to Jerusalem to tell their friends. And the disciples too had the same story. Just before they entered the upper room notice one important little verse... a verse I had never noticed before.

There they found the Eleven and those assembled with them who said “It is true – the Lord HAS risen and has appeared to Simon.” What an untold story that is- Jesus had left the two in Emmaus and appeared also to Simon – known to us as Peter. Amazing. What a wonderful reunion that must have been.

So that was the story. What can we take from it today?

Well first let’s acknowledge – like the two on the Emmaus road – that we grieve for normality ; that we grieve for not being able to worship together in our church building; that we grieve for not seeing our friends and our Christian family.

But let’s look at what Jesus may be pointing to this Easter season.

Let us hold on to what we can.

Maybe he is showing us that Jesus is not just to be found in our church buildings but in our homes and in us serving people. Jesus is not in the cave; he is not entombed.

Maybe we need to be challenged on our knowledge of the scriptures as the two friends were – we need to challenge ourselves to think who Jesus really is for us? Is he alive today? Is he our saviour – the one we can turn to; the one who releases us from our shortcomings and our sin. If he is alive and appeared to the disciples and Early Church then, surely, he is waiting to appear to us today – coming not just in bread and wine, but through his Holy Spirit and through our prayer relationship with him. He comes alive through prayer, through scripture and of course through eucharist.

And let’s recognise that Jesus journeys with us, he is patient and persistent. He knows us very well. He comes to us in our homes just as he came to those in Emmaus and the disciples in our homes and he says to us: ‘Shalom, peace be with you.’

And finally, a word of encouragement from Sister Julian of Norwich, a Christian mystic who died in the early part of the 15th century. Julian received a series of revelations from the Lord which she wrote down. When she had doubts about what God was doing in the world she recorded that God said to her:

“I will make all thing well, and I shall make all thing well; and thou shalt see thyself that all manner of thing shall be well.”

Amen.

