

26 April 2020 St Brandon's

**Luke 24: 13-35    The Road to Emmaus    Anna Brooker**

*Prayer: Risen Lord, as we think about this amazing story, may we, like those first disciples, listen and learn from you, and may our eyes be opened to see you, through the grace and power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.*

2020- a new decade, new hopes and dreams, a new chance to stop the climate crisis and care for creation, an exciting holiday, a spring wedding, a family celebration, the Olympics, Liverpool finally winning the Premier League again! On 1<sup>st</sup> January we all had so many hopes for this year.

But now?

It seems that everything is different and we will define our lives by the 'before' and 'after' of COVID 19. We are already trying to puzzle out what the future looks like, for it certainly won't be the same. So many dreams crashed, promises broken, confusion, and for some, despair....

And again this Sunday, the Bible speaks to us exactly where we are.

Cleopas and his spouse, or friend – I always like to think she was a woman- are trudging along, together, for we think they are part of the same household, no social distancing necessary. Close enough to talk in hushed voices, which won't be overheard should they pass anyone else on the road.

They are, essentially, running away: they are scared. They are getting out of Jerusalem in case they're recognised as disciples of Jesus, in case the Romans come for them too. Especially with the rumours that are now spreading, the lies about seeing Jesus again, alive... that is sure to unnerve the authorities.

We've learned to walk like that, these last few weeks. To give everyone a wide berth, to keep out of each other's way, for fear of infection. And in our darker moments we wonder if we will ever again be able to sit round a table, share a laugh in the pub, hug our grandchildren, play football, go to school, or to church... As Cleopas says, *'We had hoped....'*

*We had hoped*, at St Brandon's today, to be reviewing the past year and giving thanks to God, to be electing our new PCC, church wardens, deanery synod reps and to be celebrating together after the business of our Annual Parochial Church Meeting. *We had hoped...*

That meeting has been postponed until the autumn, and our valiant representatives authorised to carry on, for which I am, and I know you all are, extremely grateful. Thank you, PCC. Thank you, Deanery reps.

Thank you James and Hester, church wardens who have been a tower of strength in the last month especially.

And *we had hoped* also to look forward, to consider where God is calling us as a church, to continue the *Setting Sail* journey which we began with such energy last September, and to work out our part in *Waymark*, the new diocesan plans for our churches, as we seek to bless our communities in Jesus' name.

And on the Road to Emmaus today, fleeing Jerusalem, we could be tempted to just let go of all of that, all that we had hoped for today and beyond...

And if Cleopas and his companion had made that journey alone, all the way to Emmaus and another troubled night's sleep. that would be the end of the story.

But onto that road, out of nowhere, comes a stranger; they barely hear his footsteps before he is there, between them, breaking every rule of social distancing, interrupting with his rude and personal questions: 'What are you talking about?' 'What things?'

They are so shocked they stop, stunned, and just a bit terrified too, for they have no idea who he is.

But something about the way he looks at them, looks into them, gives Cleopas the courage to open his mouth and to start walking again... and with each step it all tumbles out, the disappointment, fear, and despair. The stranger keeps in step with them, says nothing, listens...until Cleopas has said it all.

I wonder if we have dared to tell Jesus how we are feeling at the moment?

We may need to use words, but we don't have to. Can we be brave enough to

tell him how it really is, to trust that he cares about how this time is for *us*, even if we feel our lot is much better than other people's? Will we stop, see that he is there, asking, and give him an honest reply?

This week sees the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Captain Tom Moore, who has captured the nation's heart and imagination by his fundraising and his walking and now, to cap it all, by his Number One hit, 'You'll never walk alone'. (That is my second and final Liverpudlian reference for today.)

It may be sentimental but for us as Christians it is true. We will never walk alone, not because of sunshine through the clouds or silver linings, or rainbows, beautiful and helpful as these may be...

We will never walk alone because the risen Christ walks with us. Jesus is alive and acting in our lives and in our world. We never do and never will walk alone.

We know how the story continues – Jesus talks with the two Jewish disciples about their faith in God, as revealed in their Scriptures and about how the Messiah had to die – that his death wasn't failure, but fulfilment- of all that was needed. Jesus wasn't the Messiah they had hoped for, but he was the Messiah they needed.

Jesus' suffering was necessary because otherwise God would always be a God out there and over there, removed from pain, suffering and death. But God is love, and Jesus' death was the proof of that unconditional and never-ending love.

How we all, and our crowded cities, locked down care homes, overworked hospitals, across the world, need to hear that good news of God's love today...

As the stranger on the road explained all of this to his fellow walkers, their hearts burned within them- that is, the Holy Spirit energised and reawakened them, opened their eyes, helped them to 'get it'.

Our future plans, as individuals, as communities , and as a church, are not now what we had hoped for, but Jesus walks with us as we start to

understand God's plans in and through what feels like loss, failure, and tragedy.

In our APCM *I had hoped* to launch our search for the next Shared Ministry Development Team (snappily called the SMDT) for St Brandon's. *We had hoped*, and we had plans, none of which work under the present conditions. But as I have prayed and pondered, helped very much by others this week, and by reading today's gospel, I see it a bit differently now, and with new hope...

Shared ministry has been a fundamental part of our church for many years and we need it now more than ever.. Later today we will send round a 'snapshot in words' taken by the last team to help capture what it's about. And we hope it will inspire you, either to suggest some names, or bravely to say, 'I'd like to have a go at that'.

We're looking for people who will be like Cleopas and his companion. People who are prepared to hold things and say things as they are- the messy stuff and the painful parts as well as the joys in our life together. People who will read the Bible together and listen to Jesus, in silence and prayer, to understand what it means for us, to see our church through Christ's eyes and to discover his plans. And we also need people who will open their hearts to the Holy Spirit, to burn with love and passion for Jesus and his kingdom, as the Spirit inspires them. That's really important too!

If, as I've been speaking now, you sense that inner glow or fire, do act on it, pray some more and get in touch, please. The Navigator message you receive later will say a bit more about what being part of the SMDT is likely to involve, and explain how to contact me about it.

*The Road to Emmaus* – a journey begun in fear and failure. But Jesus comes, he takes the initiative, and by the time they reach Emmaus they are in a totally different place. The stranger is now a friend, Jesus no longer distant but *with them*, both physically and inwardly as the Spirit burns in their hearts. Jesus who was alive that day and is alive now...They have been listened to, attentively, with time and love; they have been fed spiritually as he has opened up the Scriptures to them and made sense of their experience. They

will define their lives forever by this day, the before and after of meeting the Risen Lord.

We leave them at the door, as he accepts their invitation to eat with them, for that is what we too will do next in our service, we will welcome the risen Christ and be welcomed by him.

And afterwards we, like them, will hit the road again, to go out, virtually perhaps, by phone or letter or online, to share the good news, in word and deed, on the Road *from* Emmaus... but that's for another time. Amen.