

Hospitality – Meeting Jesus again

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Easter 3 A– Emmaus Road – *Hospitality – Meeting Jesus again*

The two shattered travellers told the stranger, *we'd hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem us*. There are now 130 million forcibly displaced people walking that road of shattered hopes with them. And in the crisis gripping the world today, we might all wonder what's to become of our life's hopes. Today's gospel story invites us to know that the real source of our hope may be walking right beside us. ³¹ ... *their eyes were opened, and they recognized him*.

The Emmaus story is only going to make sense from the perspective of faith. If you and I chance to meet the risen Jesus and if we are open to being touched by his life and teaching, then this story will be one which resonates with the deepest desires of our hearts. And we shouldn't be discouraged by imagining we don't have such desires. Why are we here, after all, hearing about him? Isn't there something in us that draws us back again and again, hoping to catch even the most fleeting glimpse of that astonishing stranger who may be walking by our side today? We might think we have unorthodox ideas about who Jesus is – that we somehow misunderstand him, and so we mightn't be granted that elusive glimpse.

That was exactly the case for those two travellers walking away from Jerusalem. Think about what they believed about Jesus. They told him ²¹...*we'd hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel*. They still had the idea that Jesus should be the one to rid Israel of the Romans, and turn it into an independent state with him as its ruler; a political king like David was. But because they wanted his power to be political power, they

were baffled by the vulnerability of the crucified Jesus. It's the same delusion gripping the world now; counterfeit messiahs telling us the lie that our salvation lies in *their* weapons. But Jesus *did* reveal himself to these two travellers.

These two had showed their misunderstanding in the very act of retreating to Emmaus that day. Earlier in the gospel, when ^{9.51} *Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem*, they'd walked with him. But today, they were walking away from Jerusalem – literally turning their backs on the hope that had been their compass until then. We meet them today leaving behind their cherished image of Jesus, and descending the mountain from Jerusalem to the plains; abandoning a mountain of hope. But even then, Jesus came to accompany them – gently to teach them again, and to reveal to them a deeper hope; a hope so deep in their hearts that they were hardly conscious of it. They wondered at it later, how their hearts had been set on fire. ³³ *That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.* They resumed the original course that they had chosen to travel with Jesus.

It's important to remember what opened the eyes of these two disciples. The first thing was teaching; Jesus' **faithful teaching of the scriptures** set their hearts on fire. This is the responsibility of every Christian gathering. Hearts and minds need to be offered the scriptures' power to inspire faith. That was the turning point for these two friends on their journey.

The second thing that opened their eyes was **something they did**. They responded to the teaching with gratitude. They offered to host their strange companion and eat with him. Their response to the gift of inspired teaching was **hospitality**. Being taught from scripture is at once a duty and a means of experiencing God's grace. It's a duty because scripture enables a response of faith: Isa 55 ¹¹ *so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me*

empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. And it's a means of grace, particularly when your response to the scriptures is hospitality. For then you may discover your guest is an angel, or even Jesus.

The third thing which opened their eyes was **understanding**: firstly, realising that they were in the presence of Jesus in his crucified, risen, physical body; and secondly that he was made recognisable to them in the breaking of the bread.

His physical body – he'd walked miles with them teaching them, yet still they didn't recognise him. So understanding on its own is not enough. Just so with the scriptures – often in themselves, not enough. But together with the special actions which Jesus himself handed down to us – in today's story, re-enacting the Last Supper – they recognised the risen Jesus for themselves. That's what we're here to discover. In our *gathering, listening, singing* and in our *sharing of the sacrament* – and we need them all – we find that we are the risen body of Christ in this place.

For our two companions on the road, it still didn't stop there. The **final act is to respond**. These disciples responded in two ways. The response to God's call is to do justly and act kindly, and that was shown in their insistent hospitality.

To the experience of meeting Jesus, the response is to seek out fellowship with others to celebrate Christ risen, and go out to proclaim him. And that they did too.

This parish has all these gifts: fellowship, scriptural study, hospitality and faithful, Eucharistic worship. And yet, in our very uncertain time, these are not enough. We need two more things. We need to embody words and actions that offer people *real* hope. We need to walk alongside people and open the message with them. And we must do it humbly recognising that as much as our companions on the way might meet Jesus in us,

we might just as easily meet Jesus, face to face, in them.
Amen