

Reflection for the 3rd Sunday of Easter

Psalm 40:1-3

*'I waited patiently for the Lord to help me,
and he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the pit of despair,
out of the mud and the mire.
He set my feet on solid ground
and steadied me as I walked along.
He has given me a new song to sing,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see what he has done and be amazed.
They will put their trust in the Lord.*

Luke 24:13-35

The Walk to Emmaus

¹³On that same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and they were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed, Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them; ¹⁶they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him. ¹⁷Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about to each other, as you walk along?"

They stood still, with sad faces. ¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?"

¹⁹"What things?" he asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. "This man was a prophet and was considered by God and by all the people to be powerful in everything he said and did. ²⁰Our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and he was crucified. ²¹And we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free! Besides all that, this is now the third day since it happened. ²²Some of the women of our group surprised us; they went at dawn to the tomb, ²³but could not find his body. They came back saying they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive. ²⁴Some of our group went to the tomb and found it exactly as the women had said, but they did not see him."

²⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! ²⁶ Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?" ²⁷ And Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther; ²⁹ but they held him back, saying, "Stay with us; the day is almost over and it is getting dark." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ He sat down to eat with them, took the bread, and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

³³ They got up at once and went back to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven disciples gathered together with the others ³⁴ and saying, "The Lord is risen indeed! He has appeared to Simon!"

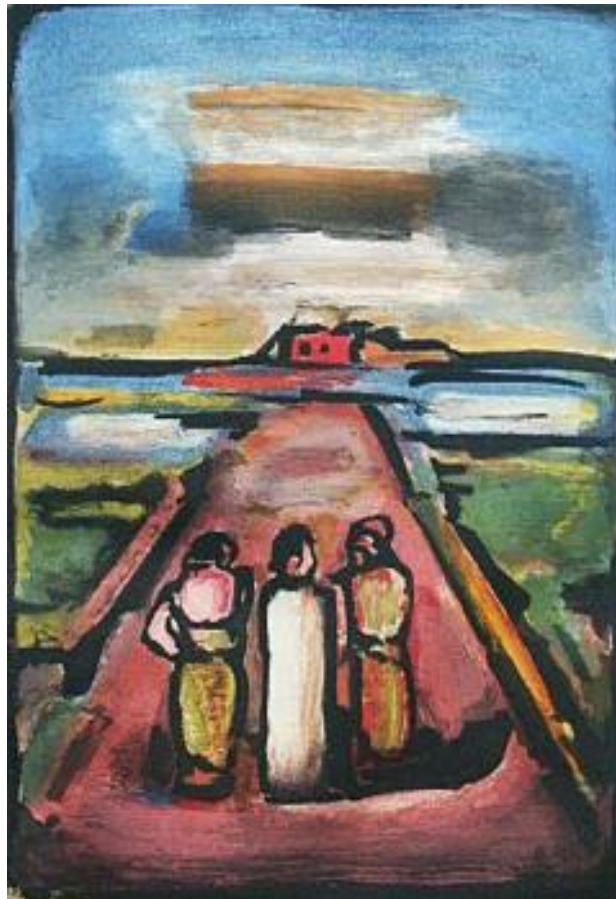
³⁵ The two then explained to them what had happened on the road, and how they had recognized the Lord when he broke the bread.

One of the things we are being encouraged to do during this time of lockdown is to exercise. Walking is a great exercise and in order for it to be of most cardiovascular benefit we are informed that we should walk at such a pace that we can still talk, but are unable to sing. Walking so fast that I cannot sing must be a great relief for any walking companion that comes with me, possibly that is why some of them set off at such a speed! Walking with a companion is sadly not allowed at the moment and I miss it. There is something special about setting out on a long walk with a friend, chatting and talking through anything and everything. It always seems easier to talk about difficult things when walking - I wonder if it is because we are not making eye contact, but just walking side by side both looking ahead?

Today's reading is therefore a particular favourite. Two people, then joined by another, walking and talking and discovering things whilst they travel.

This image and story has inspired many artists over the years. One painting that I particularly like is this one by G Roualt, called the Appearance on the Road to Emmaus.

One could spend a lot of time just looking and thinking and musing about the scene and what the artist is trying to convey.



I like the fact that we can see there are three people, but we can't make out their features or what they really look like. Can we see Emmaus in the distance? Are those fields or lakes they are passing on the way?

Many people also use this story as a means of meditation. This Sunday I thought that would be something to try, so I am going to print the passage again, and using part of a meditation by the Ignatian Society, give you things to stop and consider as the pair, and then the trio, make their way along the road. Put yourself in the place of one of the pair. Are you Cleopas or the unnamed other? Many has suggested the unnamed person in Cleopas' wife, but we don't know. Read it slowly, and when you

get to the parts written in red, take time to sit and think about what you are being asked.

So, are you sitting comfortably?

Then I'll begin:

It is late on Easter Day, and you're heading home. It's a long walk from Jerusalem, around 7 miles, but you're glad of the exertion. The physical work of walking might just take your mind off all that has happened in the last few days.

You're mourning the loss of your friend, but not only your friend, the person you've following as your beloved teacher. But he didn't simply die; he was executed in the most torturous, shameful way. The memory of that Friday is going to stay with you forever. Even when you sleep you can't forget that image.

So what are you and your companion talking about? Are you reliving the awful death that Jesus experienced? How do you feel?

It's good to be walking and talking with someone who understands how you are feeling. You can bear your grief together. As you walk and walk through the long afternoon, you encourage better memories perhaps.

Are you remembering all the wonderful things you saw him do, and all those stories and teachings he gave? Do you have a favourite story you are sharing with each other? Which one is it?

Are you thinking about the reports from the women who said they found the tomb empty this morning? What does all that mean?

As you walk what is the weather like? Is it cool and rainy, or dry and dusty? Can you hear birdsong? What can you smell - plants, flowers, fresh cut grass? Are you crying? Is your fellow traveller crying? Do you have to stop and comfort each other? Pause and imagine the scene, and your feelings.

Now you are joined by a stranger. Did you see him approach? Where did he appear from? You're still several miles from home - do you resent him joining you and interrupting your grieving together?

Within moments of the stranger arriving, it's clear that this person has no idea what has been going on in Jerusalem. With great heaviness and some annoyance, you give him the barest details. Just by saying the

word 'crucifixion' anyone in Roman territories will know exactly what you're talking about.

But the stranger engages in the conversation with great energy. He must be some sort of teacher because he launches into an explanation of how Jesus' fate is actually a good thing and the proper fulfilment of what was predicted long ago in the Scriptures.

You both find this fascinating and before you know it, you've arrived at your home and it's getting dark. So you invite the stranger to stay the night - it wouldn't be safe for him to continue alone. Besides, you want to hear more of what he has to say. He graciously accepts your offer.

What is your home like? Do you have to light a fire and candles? Is anyone waiting for you there, or are you coming to an empty house? Are you wondering where you'll put the stranger to sleep for the night? Do you have a spare room? Clean towels?

Once at home you prepare the evening meal,

How long does this take? Do you both do it, or all three of you?

and the three of you sit down to eat. Then the stranger takes the bread and blesses it. You feel a strange energy move through you and hover in the room.

Where have you heard this sort of blessing before?

As you take the bread, are you suddenly reminded of another occasion? A few loaves and fishes on a hillside perhaps?

Suddenly you know who this man is, eating at your table. You look into his face.

What do you see? What is his expression? What do you feel- are you suddenly cold and clammy, or is your heart beating a little too fast? Do you grab the hand of your partner? Do you look at each other? What do you know in the truth of your heart?

Did one of you say out loud 'It's the Lord?' Which one, or did you say it together?

And then the stranger vanishes.

Does the room still feel warm with his presence? Do you sit there for a while? Do you speak? When do you realise what you have to do now?

You head back to Jerusalem - you have to tell the others who are still in the city.

What is your conversation like? Or are you running and not able to speak at all? You are travelling at night, not a safe thing to be doing- What does it feel like to be on the road at this late hour?

What thoughts keep running through your mind as you head back?

How has your mood changed from your journey to Emmaus? How are you feeling now? How excited are you to get back to the disciples?

How has your perspective changed, now that you have met the risen, resurrected Jesus?

Sit quietly for a moment then bring yourself back to the present day, your chair and your home. How do you feel? Read the bible passage again. What has God said to you through this passage? Is there one image, or one word that He has left with you? Spend time this week thinking and praying about it, re-walking the road.

This story comes almost at the end of Luke's gospel. In his whole gospel Luke has been inviting us to accompany him on a journey of faith. Like these happenings on the road to Emmaus, this faith has taken us through anxiety and sorrow to meet the Jesus who has accomplished his Father's work, and longs to share the secret of it - and the gift of his own presence - with us, his followers. Theologian N T Wright sums the gospel up this way:

'Luke in his gospel describes for us all that Jesus would finally accomplish at Jerusalem. The real slave-master, keeping the human race in bondage, is death itself. Earthly tyrants borrow power from death to boost their rule; that's why crucifixion was such a symbol of Roman authority. Victory over death robs the powers of their main threat. Sin, which means humans rebelling against God and so conspiring with death to deface God's good creation, is likewise defeated. Jesus has led God's new people out of slavery, and now invites them to accompany him on the new journey to the promised land.

The road to Emmaus is just the beginning. We, like Cleopas and his fellow traveller have gone from 'We had hoped..' to 'We have hope'.

Hearing Jesus' voice in scripture, knowing him in the breaking of bread, is the way. Welcome to God's new world!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ,
Stay with us, too, we pray,
in every part of our journey,
no matter how full of doubt or fear we may be today.

Through your Holy Spirit,
we pray that you will open our eyes, too
Help us see you as our risen Lord
in all your beauty,
and in all your loving power.

Amen.

(by John Witvliet)

Music - Casting Crowns - Praise you in this storm

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YUGwUgBvTU>