

Easter III 2020 (Year A)

I don't know if anyone is experiencing any cravings for lost aspects of life during this lockdown beyond the obvious of family, friends and social interaction - that goes without saying. I must say that there is one for me, and I am going to give a shot at alleviating it. Sourdough bread. Yes, I have a Covid-craving for lovely sourdough bread! How I long for a slice of sourdough bread, preferably warm with lovely salted butter on it. The trouble is that getting the leaven started is quite involved. I managed to get a bag of flour from the fellow at the Rose and Crown, but apparently need a thermometer to measure the heat of water I am adding to the flour (precisely at 78°F). Now I can't imagine that the Children of Israel had a thermometer before they dropped using leaven during the Exodus! Never mind. I will let you know how I fare.

The talk of bread has, of course, a bearing on our Gospel reading today, and I always think that the Road to Emmaus is one of the loveliest Resurrection accounts in the Gospels – a masterpiece by Luke. From beginning to end, the disciples are on a wonderful journey which represents a paradigm of Christian life and mission, and of course it is as much a journey for us as for Cleopas and his friend. Why is the other person not named? Is it a man or a woman? Is it meant to be you or me?

I have written in the news letter this week (which you will find on the website if you haven't received it via email) about the resurrection appearances of Jesus seeming like a divine game of hide-and-seek: Mary Magdalen in the garden; Cleopas and his friend on the road; at the lakeside in Galilee; even in a shuttered room - the disciples are being led on a journey of the way in which they recognise and know the Risen Lord within their lives. The Road to Emmaus is perhaps the richest recorded experience of this journey, which I think is as much ours as the disciples.

Imagine the profound shock the disciples experienced when Jesus was crucified. Here was someone they believe to be the longed-for Messiah, and yet he suffered a torturous death in the most degrading form of execution the Romans could devise. Nothing they had heard from the Lord, even his own predictions of what would happen, had opened their eyes to an understanding of one who turned the idea of Messiahship on its head. They couldn't see it through the fog of their own desires. They were trying to turn Jesus into the person they wanted him to be. Ultimately it was not through divine displays of power that the Messiah was made known, but through a pouring out of love for the world through death in order to bring about new life – resurrection life – life in its fulness – a life then offered to all.

It is no wonder that Cleopas, face downcast, answered Jesus with a sense of irony when asked what the two were discussing on that road. A story is told which seems to have no hope, no proper ending – just what seems a fanciful tale about empty tombs and angels. I think one of the lovely things to note is that Jesus listens from beginning to end without correcting what is being said. He meets them where they are before drawing them into the Divine narrative of Love. He teaches them, using the Law and the Prophets to explain the journey of Faith which all are called to explore in order to deepen their understanding of what faith in him means. This is a vital part of the Christian call; we need to constantly

engage with Scripture in order to journey alongside Jesus on the road. This interpretation is as relevant to us as to them. We are called to pick up the Bible and engage with it. Sometimes we will be perplexed, sometimes troubled at what we read, but even the seemingly most difficult passages of Scripture point towards Jesus who draws us into the divine life of God. And this life is not some spiritual Shangri-La but rooted in the knowledge that God knows every facet of our human experience through the journey Jesus makes with and for us.

I don't know about you, but there are two moments in the account which touch me greatly. One of course is when Jesus is made known in the breaking of the bread. When we meet as the Body of Christ, Jesus meets us at the table as he did Cleopas and his friend. And when we bless and break the bread, we are united with our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout all ages and places. Through receiving, we have true life in him, as we are drawn into the divine story through the dynamic of his love. At this time of separation, there is a tremendous sense of loss for many that we aren't physically able to participate, because this is one of the vital elements of Holy Communion – gathering around the altar of the Lord. Yet through Spiritual Communion we still allow the Risen Lord to come near, and this enables us to grow in the life of the Spirit. Think of our joy when we can once again break bread together!

The other moment of such joy to me is the response the two have after Jesus leaves them. No moping on their part this time. *'Weren't our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'* What do they do? Their immediate reaction is to travel to their fellow disciples to tell *them* that they have experienced the Risen Lord in the breaking of the bread.

The Road to Emmaus provides us with the pattern of the fulness of Christian life: to be open to meeting and travelling with the Lord on the road of life; opening our minds the Scriptures to see the unfolding journey which leads to Jesus; being fed by the one who is the Bread of Life itself; and then ourselves proclaiming his death and resurrection to others so that they too may know the richness of Kingdom Life.

I go back to my sourdough culture. Many of you will know the Easter Anthems from the Book of Common Prayer. I said them at the start of the Eucharist in our church on Easter Day. They start with the words, *'Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast; not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.'* 1 Corinthians 5.7b, 8

This passage from his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul uses the imagery of leaven to link our understanding of the Resurrection to the Exodus of the Children of Israel from slavery to freedom. The Risen Christ offers all who know him the ultimate freedom of Resurrection Life – a life which has no end – a life bound up within the Love of God. The working of the Holy Spirit in our lives is the **new** leaven which draws us to continually grow in the richness of life in God and to share it with **all** we encounter on our journey.

My friends. let us always seek to travel along the Emmaus Road with Jesus, to know him in the breaking of the bread, and to experience the fire of his love within our hearts. Amen



The Supper at Emmaus (1601) – Caravaggio (National Gallery, London)

Acts 2: 14a, 10-17

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them:

³⁶ Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?' ³⁸ Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.' ⁴⁰ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' ⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴² *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

I Peter 1: 17-23

¹⁷ If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. ¹⁸ You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰ He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹ Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

²² Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth^[d] so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply^[e] from the heart.^[f] ²³ You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

Luke 24: 13-35

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹ He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' ²⁵ Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.