

## Were not our hearts burning within us?

*Luke 24:13-32*

Two disciples are travelling along the road to the village of Emmaus. They are not cheerful and chattering, but companions in grief. They carry with them a burden of sadness and confusion, and, a painful question within their hearts: Where is God?

As they walk the road they are turning over in their minds all that has happened in the last few days – the arrest of Jesus, his terrible death on the cross, and the perplexing empty tomb. As another traveller joins them on the road they begin to discuss these things with him, finding it hard to understand why this fellow seems to know so little about what has happened.

*We had hoped he would be the one to redeem Israel.* They explain to their companion, and behind this we hear the questions that weigh them down: How do we make sense of this? How could God allow such a thing to happen?

The disciples give voice to the fact that their expectations of God have not been met. They do not understand what has happened or what to do next. What does God require of them now everything seems to have gone horribly wrong?

I don't think that we have any trouble relating to the questions the disciples are asking or where they have found themselves. This has been a particularly hard year for many of us with ongoing sickness, with the responsibilities and anxieties of caring for loved ones who are ill or in need, and for some of us, the sudden loss of loved ones and the deep grief and shock that brings. As a faith community we have shared the burden of fear and stress carried by those close to us, and we have also shared a sense of confusion and deep concern about shocking and terrible crisis situations worldwide. It is not difficult to place ourselves into this story, to picture ourselves walking along the dusty road trying to make sense of it all.

As they walk the two friends are joined by Jesus, although they are prevented from recognising him. He draws close to them and enters into their communion of pain and sadness.

So often, we are unaware of Christ's presence with us on our journey of faith. We can become so caught up in our pain, our stress, ourselves in general, that we develop tunnel vision and are unable to see the bigger picture, to see the face of Christ in those around us, to hear the words of Jesus in the voices of those who love us or to feel the gentle strength of the Spirit enfolding us in the prayers of those who travel with us. Sometimes it is only later that we realise that Christ has been with us all the time working towards our healing, wholeness and renewal.

Jesus calls the two friends to examine the Scriptures, the word of God, in order to find what they are looking for. As they walk he opens up to them the heritage of faith they have received, the stories of God's people, the words of the prophets, the promises of God's unfailing love and power. Jesus reminds them that they are not left helpless or powerless in the face of hardship and grief but that they in fact have a treasure trove of strength, hope and joy upon which to draw to see them through the current situation and into the future with power and life.

This is such an important reminder for us too, that we, as God's people, the body of Christ, must dwell within the living word of God, we must make our home in the Scriptures – the word of life, for this is where we are refreshed, renewed, strengthened and empowered to live Eucharistic lives and to share the gospel of life with others.

*Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?*

As the disciples walk along the road with Jesus, listening to him as he opened the scriptures to them, they began to change, to be transformed, to form a new understanding, to discover something new within themselves.

Transformation begins to take root as Jesus sits down to share a meal with the disciples at the end of the day. Jesus simply takes the bread and blesses it, and in this action of thanksgiving and hospitality the disciples recognise the presence of God within and between them. In the breaking of the bread they see God; in the breaking of the bread they see themselves and each other in a new light.

As a community of Christ we too are a Eucharistic community, a community of thanksgiving, grace, hope and joy where the hungry are fed, the lost are found, and new life is born.

The apostle Paul, in his letter of encouragement to the church in Colossae, picks up the theme of what it is to live as a Eucharistic community when he speaks of how he prays that this church may be filled with the knowledge of God's will, that they may bear fruit as they grow in God, that they may find strength, patience and joy as they bear witness to the gift of God's grace and forgiveness. Paul does not give false assurances that the Christian life is one that is care-free or an easy road to travel. He does however, encourage this community in their walk of faith, reminding them that the darkness no longer has power over them, they have been redeemed and forgiven, they hold within them the treasure of the gospel of life and the glorious power of Christ.

We will suffer and struggle through many experiences in this human life we live, and together as a community of Christ, we will be faced with many challenges; but we also have the promise of God's blessing and grace, his healing and wholeness, and the gift of Christ's presence with us. Together, we are to bear witness to the Risen Christ who walks the journey with us, the one who sets our hearts on fire with love, with joy, with hope, with life.

In his most recent monthly *ad clerum* circular, our Bishop, Stuart, also speaks of the need for us to reignite the flame of passion for Jesus. He says:

"..as individuals and as a diocese, we need to return to this our 'first love': the gospel of Jesus come among us for the purpose of reconciliation, forgiveness and restoration. I am praying that our 'first love' will so grip us that those to whom we minister will likewise embrace, with a passion, this 'first love'."

Many of us may well have been singing a song of lament this year, a song of pain, bewilderment and powerlessness. At times we must sing such songs - we cannot but, sing such songs if we are to be true to ourselves and each other. The Psalter, the book of Psalms has within it many songs of lament.

In Christ, however, we are also given power and strength to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving, songs of new life and hope, of joyful celebration.

*O sing to the Lord a new song: sing to the Lord all the earth, sing to the Lord, bless his name tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.....*

As we come to the closing of this year and begin the Advent season of preparation and waiting on the Lord, we too are called to sing a new song – a song of life, not death.

As we prepare for a new year of loving and serving the Risen Christ within this local area, we are also being called to new ways of ministering, new forms of outreach. Some of our current ministries will undergo a re-framing, or transformation as we listen to God and follow Christ into the hearts and lives of the people of this area. Each of us will be called, encouraged and equipped to move out of our comfort zones a little in order to stand where others stand, listen to their stories, and walk the road with them as companions on the way.

My prayer for this community of faith is that we too would will be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding and, that we, with hearts set on fire with love for Christ, will go forth as agents of light and life, bringing with us the healing power of God, and discovering the face and presence of Christ in those we are called to serve.

The Lord be with you.