

Sermon - Sunday, 26.04.2020

Luke 24:13-35

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Two men are on the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus, on a frequented road, being a journey of about 2 hours on foot. On this occasion the travellers – one who remains nameless, the other called Cleopas - are under a heavy unseen burden: They were returning home from celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem. They had witnessed how their beloved leader, Jesus, was taken into custody and crucified. Helplessly they had followed the crucifixion. They were totally cast down, without hope, and unable to come to grips with his death. Now they only wanted to get out of Jerusalem, the city of death, a city in which their hope had been buried. Heavy hearted they were returning to take up their old life, knowing that life would never be the same.

Friends, these days our whole globe is experiencing pain, isolation, separation, and the prospect of lasting scars on a scale not anticipated due to the COVID19 pandemic. We are faced by circumstances where our faith becomes sorely

challenged, where God seems to be far away and uncaring, where our confidence is crushed and our hope buried - an experience with far reaching consequences for our social and economic future, and a very personal one. We carry the unseen burden of trying to work through what is happening around us and the consequences that are already being felt in our personal lives. For many this period of the Covid19 pandemic has meant a deep sense of loss when a person dear to one has passed away; our hope threatens to give way to despair when the sickness is diagnosed. Untold numbers of individuals are losing jobs; incalculable loss of income is the widespread reality of our societies worldwide; the future is uncertain; relationships become strained beyond bearing. Where does it all leave us, our faith, and our practice of it?

‘We **had** hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel’, the two said. Jesus of Nazareth had been their mighty prophet in deed and word before God and all the people. And now it was the third day since this same Jesus had been done to death by the powers that be. How could God have abandoned Jesus? How could Jesus have abandoned them?

For them Easter had not yet dawned; the story of the women seemed fanciful. They had not yet grasped the significance that Jesus' defeat and death on the cross was in truth the turning point to victory for them over death. But how could they have grasped that? They had not yet had that decisive encounter with the risen Jesus.

At this very point of total confusion and disillusionment they are joined by Jesus himself. His steps fall in with theirs, and he accompanies them as the unrecognized fellow traveller. Disappointed hope blinds their eyes to his identity. They do not realise that the hope that they were burying, the hope that they had thought lost, was right there alongside them in the engaging presence journeying with them even when he engages with them. First, he listens to their account of the past events; then he proceeds to put these events into the wide perspective of Israel's story and the prophetic promises. The unrecognized stranger re-tells the whole story. The disciples sense that the stranger was retelling their story, making sense of what they could not understand. Their hearts begin to be stirred; to vibrate anew with the confidence that had been theirs when Jesus had lived and moved with them.

The mysterious presence of the Risen Christ animates them, and their lamentation gives way to the stirrings of new hope.

Friends, the gospel passage of today reminds us that we must expect the unexpected: Jesus of Nazareth, the risen Lord journeys alongside us. When we feel like despairing over what is happening; despairing that the fellowship we are used to sharing around God's table seems broken, let us draw close to the source of our hope, let us listen to the good news story that Jesus has to tell us and discover the signs that reveal Jesus' presence among us. We too cannot part company with Jesus in the difficult days we are encountering.

As the disciples, whose hearts had felt the stirrings of new hope, reach their destination, they invite their fellow traveler into share bread with them. This request of the two disciples for Jesus to come into the home can become a model for our prayer that God be present with us, even in these days of enforced isolation.

During dinner Jesus, the guest, takes the initiative and becomes the host. He takes bread, blesses and breaks it, and shares it with them. In this act of breaking bread, the disciples'

eyes are opened to their Lord, Jesus, the living Christ! The encounter of the two disciples with the Risen Lord, experienced in the breaking of the bread, spurs them into action. They hastily make their way back to Jerusalem to tell their friends their experience. Those that shortly before, were turning their back on that city of death and destroyed hope, return to it with the message of life.

Friends, today in the Easter season of 2020, we are still unable to gather together as a community for Holy Communion due to the COVID19 lockdown, but we can all the more look forward to the day when the Eucharistic fast will come to an end.

Until then, friends, may we recognize Christ's presence with us through his WORD which strengthens us as Christians to experience the friendship and fellowship of the crucified and risen Jesus. May we, like those two disciples, rejoice and boldly share our confidence in the Risen Christ through whatever channels we can. May we share our experience with humility, because we know that God reveals himself to people in diverse and surprising ways. Amen.