

April 6th 08, The Road to Emmaus, Ely Cathedral. 10.30am

Prayer

Not recognising Jesus forms an important part of the Easter story. Mary Magdalene does not recognise Jesus - she thinks he is the gardener. The end of Matthew's gospel tells us that, when the disciples saw him, they worshipped him - 'though some doubted.' In Luke's gospel, when the disciples see Jesus they are terrified, thinking him to be a ghost. It is only when they touch his hands and feet and see him eating some fish that truly recognise him. Thomas is only convinced when he puts his hands into the wounds in Jesus' hands and side. When the disciples are fishing in the Sea of Galilee Peter fails to recognise Jesus on the shore. It is only when **John** says: 'it is the Lord' that Peter jumps out of the boat and dashes ashore. And here too, in this familiar reading from St Luke's gospel, the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, despite their long conversation on the road, fail to recognise who it is they are talking to.

Maybe this has something to do with the fact that Jesus' resurrection body is not the same as his former body?

However, the accounts themselves seem to refute this, since Jesus is at pains to point out, as we have seen, that he is the same 'flesh and blood'. I think it is more likely that Jesus is profoundly changed, by his suffering and death. ///

I was at John Inge's enthronement a few weeks ago in Worcester and met someone who has been, and still is, seriously ill. I hardly recognised him. I sat down and talked with him for a while and then another member of our group said: 'who was that you were talking to?' When I told him he was astonished. He had worked with this man as a close colleague for many years, but completely failed to recognise him. // Maybe you've had that experience. You go and visit someone in hospital and come out saying; 'I wouldn't have recognised her'. //

Well, the disciples seem to find it hard to recognise the risen Jesus. And if we take the resurrection seriously, I think we can only conclude that the immense suffering he has gone through has changed him - almost beyond recognition.

When Thomas finally does recognise him, it is not so much his risenness he recognises, // but his woundedness. ///

There is no record in the gospels as to what Jesus' wounds were like after the resurrection. We do not know if they were healed scars - or still open wounds. They are certainly open enough for Jesus to tell Thomas: 'Put your hand in'. // And this is of *huge* significance for *us*. Because the risen Christ is not some pristine, magazine, pin-up of perfection. He is a man who has conquered sin and death at *huge cost*. And that huge cost is imprinted forever on his *still* wounded body, the body he takes with him, as we shall think about at Ascension-tide, into the heart of God, forever. // It is not so much that Jesus *once* knew what it was like to suffer and to die. It is more that, in Jesus, God bears forever, in his own flesh, the huge cost of the suffering and sin of the world, and can, forever, empathise with *our* pain & our suffering, as one who knows it, first hand. // The image of the risen ascended Christ, above us in the Octagon, carved by John of Burwell, gives accurate testimony to this. He looks down upon us, one hand raised in blessing.

But with his left hand he is pulling open his clothing, revealing the deep, red-raw wound in his side. A true picture of our risen, wounded Lord. //

Well, all that by way of a pre-amble. Because the 'Road to Emmaus' story brings us to the heart of our faith & worship. Although they do not recognise him, Jesus comes alongside these two, grief-stricken disciples and then, gradually, having listened to their tale of woe, he begins to explain to them how this all fits in *both* with what the scriptures say about the Christ *and* how it is all fulfilled in Jesus. //

Then they arrive at the village, and he is about to go on, but they beg him to stay. So, he does. And as they sit to eat, he takes the bread, and blesses it, and breaks it. And, suddenly, it all fits together, it all makes sense, their eyes are opened, and they recognise him. But as soon as they do, he disappears from their sight. And, although it is now dark, and travelling the roads at night is not safe, they set off at once to bear witness to the risen Christ. And what they say reflects exactly what we are doing this morning. //

'Were our hearts not burning within us as he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?' And they told the disciples how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.//////////

Word/// and sacrament.// It's there in our Liturgy - Ministry of the Word; and Ministry of the Sacrament. Opening the scriptures; and sharing bread & wine around the Lord's table. // These two things are at the heart of our worship as we seek to listen to & understand the Bible and then, re-enacting that last supper, allow Jesus to meet with us as we share bread & wine and hear his words: 'This is my body broken for you. This is my blood, shed for you.' ////////////

There are some key moments in this account which are just as important for us today as for those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. //

First of all, 'Jesus himself draws near to them'. He listens to them & finds out what is on their hearts.// It is always this way. He always makes the first move. Before we seek him he has found us.//As we come to worship him this morning, he is already here.//

Before we begin to pray, he knows what we need. He *has* come to us, *has* drawn near to us. He *is* here to meet with us; listening to *our* story// before *he* tells us *his*.//

And then there is another key moment, what you might call a 'Kairos' moment. Kairos is one of the Greek words for time. But it doesn't mean time in the sense of: 'Well! It's past 11 o'clock & he really ought to be finishing his sermon by now'. It means rather, a *moment of opportunity*, a moment when God opens up for us a new possibility. A moment to be grasped - or indeed, a moment to be lost. The disciples are stopping in the village for the night, but Jesus is about to carry on along the road. So they urge him, strongly, to stay with them.// Maybe *this*, is a Kairos moment for *you* this morning, as you sense the risen, wounded Christ drawing near to *you*. A moment you can enjoy, briefly - & then let it pass.//Or *the* moment, when you can say: 'Please Lord, don't go.// Stay with me// now, & always.'//

And then there is the moment of *recognition*. That moment when they see who he is. One of those rare, but precious, moments when we sense Christ's presence; know he has touched us, shown himself to us. It is often, as for these disciples, a fleeting glimpse. But, when it happens, it is enough. Enough to hold us;// enough to satisfy our hearts.//

And then there is *another* key moment. The moment *after* they recognise him, & after he has gone. That moment when it is now dark & they should really head for bed and perhaps think about what to do in the morning. But *that* is the moment when it cannot wait, when the urgency of it forces them out of the door, sends them hurrying back up the road, in the darkness & through the danger, to Jerusalem, to witness to the risen Lord.//

Our service this morning ends with the words: 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.' This is not just some nice catchphrase to round off our service. // It is at the heart of what we are about.//

The RC's call the Communion Service: 'Mass' from the Latin *Missa*, which is derived from the verb: 'to send'. It's where we get our word 'mission'.// Any genuine encounter with Christ is *not* something we can keep to ourselves. It results in our going out to spread the good news.//

It would be like getting married or having a baby and not mentioning it to anybody. How could you sit on news like that? I remember when our daughter told us she was expecting our first grandchild. She asked us not to tell anybody for a couple of months. But how could you keep a secret like that?// So we told everybody we knew, straight away.//...as she keeps reminding us!///

Our encounters with Christ are not primarily in order that we can feel better ourselves, or even just to find strength to cope for the week ahead. We meet with Christ *in order to be his witnesses* - to go out & proclaim, in word and deed, his love and saving grace, to a needy world. After all, how could anyone sit on news like that?

//

That is why we are here this morning. To bring to God all that is on our hearts. To hear God speaking to us through the Scriptures. To invite Christ into our hearts and lives. To meet him as we break bread together around his table. And then to go out, bearing witness to the love and grace of our Risen Lord.
//This is our faith. This is the faith of the church. //

So, may God's word burn within us this morning.

May we invite him in to stay with us, forever.

May we recognise him as we break bread together around his table.

And may we leave here with joy in our hearts and on our lips, to love and serve our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

//To him be the glory// now// and forever. //

Amen.