

2024 TALK, 31.3.24: LUKE 24:1-12 / 13-36

RUNNING TOWARDS, WALKING AWAY; STAYING TOGETHER, GOING BEYOND

The women, at least, were ready. They had prepared spices to embalm the body of Jesus with. They got up very early. They were on a mission to pay their last respects to their LORD. After having just witnessed him suffering an excruciating & publicly shaming death. They thought they were prepared. They had put everything in place, practically, but still their minds were all over the place. I don't think any of them were really mentally in the right frame of mind for the grim task that they thought was facing them.

Alleluia! The good news of Easter. For us. And for all time. None of these women were in any way prepared. They certainly weren't prepared for what was about to unfold in the garden which held Jesus' tomb.

They did not expect to see the stone rolled away from the entrance. They did not expect to hear the challenge of the angels: 'Why are you looking for the living among the dead'. Their unbelieving ears could not take in the news: 'He is not here, he is risen, just as he told you'.

The women rush back to share this news. And the other disciples echo the women's unbelief, only more so. All of them are in complete disarray. They don't know what to think, who to believe. They don't know whether they are coming or going. A picture of perfect confusion. Something we too can certainly relate to. We would have been just the same.

Peter is chosen by Luke to epitomise this whirlwind of emotions. One moment Peter is running to the tomb. The next moment we leave him physically wandering around & mentally wondering about all these things. Two other disciples end up walking away from Jerusalem, talking despondently about the events they had just been a part of. Why on earth would you be walking away from Jerusalem at a time like this? They just don't know whether they are coming or going. Or what to make of all this. What will become of them...?

Peter was just the same. The words of the women seemed like 'nonsense' to him. Nevertheless what they shared was enough to stir Peter from his numbing grief & guilt. He got up and ran. Running to the tomb, Peter did not expect to see the stone rolled away. He did not expect to see Jesus. He did not expect to see those grave clothes, neatly folded in the tomb. Can you imagine this. Just

after being raised to new life, Jesus, with a smile on his face, neatly folding the grave clothes that once bound him? Jesus certainly had a sense of humour. A sense of occasion. Alleluia!

Good Friday & Easter Sunday show us humanity & all creation 'in extremis'. We see all the extremes of creation's experience in sharp relief. All bound up together: fear & courage; despair & joy; faith & unbelief; suffering & hope; brokenness & healing; life & death; cross & resurrection. The extremes of all human experience are here in the Easter story – and are equally embraced by God. As the apostle Paul was to later write: 'Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus'... Nothing – not death nor life, not angels nor demons, not all the powers on earth or in heaven. None of these things. Whatever you can think of. Nothing can separate us from the love God demonstrated for us through Jesus. Demonstrated for us by his death on the cross & his resurrection from the tomb. Alleluia! Praise the LORD!

Let's pick up the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: 'Jesus walked with them'. Jesus talked with them. But they were kept from recognising him. Jesus' gentle sense of humour is once again evident, with the question he first asks them: 'What are you talking about?'... 'What things have happened in these days?'.

'Do you not know?' says the astonished Cleopas. Little does he know he is about to move to a whole new level of astonishment... 'You must be the only one in these parts who doesn't know about these things'... he goes on. How he & his companion must have laughed about what they first said to Jesus.

They did not see Jesus. Neither the women. Nor Peter. Nor these two on the road to Emmaus. None of them saw Jesus. And then, when these two **do** see him for the first time after his death, Jesus promptly disappears.

I wonder if we are like this. How much are we like these first disciples? I wonder if we are like this now, this Easter? Still stuck in Easter Saturday. Still not seeing Jesus, even though our LORD is risen & among us. We can clearly see evidence that Jesus is risen. Just look around you. We can see something of Jesus in the bricks & mortar of this church building. We can see Jesus in creation, and the new life of spring. We can see Jesus in our sisters & brothers in Christ sitting next to us. We can see Jesus in the stories of each of our lives. We can see the risen Jesus in the stories of the Bible. We can see Jesus in the

Holy Spirit, who continues to be present & at work in people & in our world. We can see Jesus here, present among us in bread & wine.

Part of me is surprised that these two disciples didn't recognise Jesus sooner. When Jesus rebuked them for their 'foolishness & their slowness to believe', this is a clear reminder of how Jesus spoke to the disciples during his ministry. But they do **begin** to be reminded of Jesus, as they listened to him opening the scriptures to them, on the way. I love this description of their 'hearts burning' as Jesus spoke with them & opened their hearts & minds.

Little wonder these two beg their wonderful stranger to stay with them. Little wonder that Jesus is finally recognised by them when he breaks bread for them. Little wonder Jesus moves on from this encounter. Little wonder Jesus is looking to 'go beyond', as always. Jesus has already gone far beyond anyone's expectations in laying down his life for our sins. Jesus has gone far beyond our limited expectations by making a spectacle of all the powers of darkness on the cross. Jesus has gone far beyond our tiny minds, by triumphing over death & being raised to new life, exalted far above all things.

We see Christ crucified in his broken body & blood today. We see the risen Jesus when he personally breaks bread for us today. We see the risen Jesus in the one body of Christ we are part of. Today we hear the Holy Spirit amongst us, declaring the peace of Christ... I love the way Luke puts it here at the end of our passage. 'While they were **still talking**, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them: "Peace be with you" ...

We no longer have to live in Good Friday or Easter Saturday. Jesus has 'gone beyond' for us. We can walk together with him into the new life of a new day. Like the women, like Peter, like Cleopas, we are called to: get up, to run, to walk, to wonder, to share together, to believe, to worship – in Spirit and in truth. Sisters & brothers in Christ, I say 'Peace be with you'. This Easter Sunday morning, along with the angels, the women & the other disciples we proclaim: 'Christ has risen'!. He is risen from the dead, once & for all – for us & all creation. Alleluia !

Are you ready to move on from Easter Saturday? Are we ready to be confronted by the risen Jesus today ? As we prepare to join together in sharing bread & wine, I would like to read to you one of George Herbert's poems, simply entitled 'Love'... READ.

