

Easter Day: Sunday April 4th: Cleopas and Companion [Luke 24:13-35](#): 'Were not our hearts burning within us'

As a teenager, being a regular supporter of the local football team, the walk home after a home defeat, with its disappointment and inevitable discussions with fellow fans about the failings of individual players and the team as a whole, was always a bit of a trudge. It took me a while to realise that the result of any football match is, in the great scheme of things, pretty insignificant.

Two people with far, far more to be disappointed about, are walking back home to Emmaus. They are downcast and it is good that they have each other (they may well have been a married couple). Things have moved on a little since yesterday because of strange reports of an empty tomb and a vision of angels (v 22-24) but the penny hasn't yet dropped and the mood is still one of despondency.

But this is the day that changes everything. As they explain their sadness to the stranger, the continuing problem for Cleopas and his companion, notwithstanding angelic visitations, is the finality of crucifixion - Jesus is dead! It's difficult to know why they failed to recognise him as he walked along, but the intuitive leap required was clearly beyond them. I remember some years ago watching a singing competition on television of the kind in which one contestant was knocked out each week until the last two remaining singers battled it out in the final. It wasn't until the very last show that I realised that I had seen one of the finalists performing at a free concert during the Orkney Folk Festival a few years before. At no point during the series up until that point had I made the connection.

The heart of this beautiful story comes after Cleopas and his companion invite Jesus to stay

with them. It is as they are at table that suddenly Jesus, for him it is, takes over the duties of the host. As he takes the bread, gives thanks, breaks it and begins to give it to them (v 30) they suddenly see who it is and we see the unmistakable shape of the service by which we remember his sacrifice week by week. It is a moment of recognition before Jesus suddenly vanishes. Holy Communion, the Eucharist, Mass, the Lord's Supper, whatever we call it, is not just about remembering events of



Sun, sky and trees on the Mount of Olives

two thousand years ago, it is about recognising the presence of the living Lord who meets us in bread and wine before sending us out to share his love.

As Cleopas and his companion reflect on their experience, they realise that the transformation actually began on the road when their hearts burned as the 'stranger' opened the Scriptures to them (v 32). So it is that on our life journey Jesus is always with us

even when we don't recognise he's there. We may not feel his presence, we may be too busy to even think about it or we may not be open to the possibility; but he is there. And his risen presence has the power to transform.

The two travellers immediately turn themselves around and head for Jerusalem where they meet the other disciples who are also full of joy having embraced the unlooked for, un hoped for truth that Jesus is alive. It seems that by this stage, of the eleven (no Judas, of course), Jesus had as yet appeared only to Peter (called Simon here, which was his real name – v 34). I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall on that occasion. Not only has Peter had to deal with the death of his great friend and teacher, he's also had plenty of time to reflect on his own moral failure in denying three times that he had ever had anything to do with him. Jesus has not yet fully restored him and made him ready to lead the church; that comes later in Galilee (John 21 v 15-17). But the joy and the sheer relief of Peter must have been palpable.

It's worth pointing out that this story is about people who initially found the idea that anybody could rise from the dead very difficult to get a handle on; it was every bit as challenging a concept for them as it is in today's secular culture. Cleopas and his companion were intelligent human beings who, as we have seen, were unable to grasp that Jesus was the one walking and talking with them because, to their minds, it was an impossibility.

We don't have to throw our brains away to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. It was something he said would happen, there is a solid historical foundation for believing it and it offers us and our distracted generation an entirely new perspective on life. This is not pie in the sky when you die; its credible truth attested to by many witnesses. We are not just here by chance; we are here because we are children of God. This life is not all there is; it is part of something much greater and more wonderful. In our daily lives we are not left to shift for ourselves, Jesus has promised us his constant presence. The risen Lord offers all of us, along with the repentant criminal, the hope of glory and the assurance that we will be with him for ever.

At each service of Holy Communion we remember the story of Jesus' suffering and death as we share tokens of bread and wine taking us back to the moment his body was broken and blood poured from the wound in his side. It sounds quite grim put like that. Yet this sacrifice had to be made both to deal with the sins that disfigure our own lives and the world of which we are a part. It was the victory of the risen Lord over sin and death on the cross that opened the way to a sure and certain hope and hands us an invitation to be citizens of the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21 v 1). Because Jesus died and rose again, we will see God's kingdom in all its fullness. We share a hope that in that kingdom there will be no more tears or pain, all wrongs will have been put right and we will be able to enjoy God for ever. If that isn't good news, I don't know what is.

Our call as Christians is to be witnesses to these truths and make them visible in the way we live our lives. We won't be able to do that perfectly because we are all fallible and sometimes make mistakes. Those who saw the risen Jesus after his resurrection were just

as human as we are yet many people became followers of Jesus because of their faithful witness. The key thing is that we don't have to share our faith in the risen Lord in our own strength, even though that is too often the way we choose to do it. We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to encourage and enable us. Jesus was only able to be in one place at one time but the Holy Spirit is with all believers all the time to guide us into all truth (John 16 v 13) and help us to live out our faith and witness to the amazing truth that 'Christ has died, Christ is risen and Christ will come again'.

Alleluia Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Questions: How often do you recognise the presence of Jesus in your life? What might help to make you more aware of it?

Prayer: Risen Lord Jesus, thank you that you are with us today and every moment of our lives. Help us to put our trust in you and to recognise your presence. Amen.