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Today we have heard about another of the encounters with the risen Christ: the story of the Road to Emmaus.

In terms of drama it has everything; sorrow, suspense, puzzlement, gradual dawning of light; then in the second half, unexpected actions, astonished recognition, a flurry of excitement and activity. It's both a wonderful, unique and spell binding tale, and also a model for a great deal of what being a Christian, from that day to this is all about. It speaks of great Christian hope through the joy of the Resurrection. That is something that we need to be more consciously aware of at this time in our lives.

In Luke's Gospel the resurrection appearances become points of teaching and convincing.

It is questionable why the two disciples could walk 7 miles without recognising someone who was not only familiar to them but was also at that time the focus of their concerns. Luke's story shows

how the eucharistic meals of the church unite his disciples to the living presence of the risen Lord. In his follow up accounts in the Acts of the Apostles [2.42] Luke puts the 'breaking of bread' at the heart of the life of the young community. This was also the climax of the action of Jesus at the Last Supper as Luke tells of it [22.19a], and it is that action that realises and discloses his presence after the Resurrection [24.35] as we just heard. The story reflects the times and outlook of the life of the community as Luke would have it be after the Ascension.

In the story, teaching and convincing are played out in through prophecy on the journey and during a meal afterwards at the disciples' home. The risen Jesus is alongside the disciples both as they travel and when they reach their destination.

*On the road.*

Significantly, the Emmaus story begins and ends in Jerusalem. [24. 13, 33]

As they journey together Jesus enables the two disciples to make sense of the challenging and confusing events that have recently happened to them and others earlier in the day.

There is speculation that Cleopas is the same person that the gospel writer John records as standing at the foot of the cross with Jesus' mother Mary, her sister Mary – the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. [John 19. 25] So, Cleopas and Clopas could be the same person, and the other disciple on the road with him was likely his wife Mary (Jesus' aunt).

The ever-compassionate risen Jesus has not just caught up with two of his closest disciples but also a family returning home filled with sadness.

Notice then how Jesus allows the disciples to tell the story of what's happened. Why do we think he does this? Well, we also heard that Cleopas goes into quite a lot of detail (7 verses Luke records) about the events in Jerusalem earlier that day. They remember particularly that '[Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet mighty in deed and word](#)' [24. 19].

The disciples were walking in the wrong direction though – away from the fellowship of the believers back in Jerusalem. We are likely to miss Jesus and withdraw from the strength found in other believers when we become pre-occupied with our dashed hopes and frustrated plans. Only when we are looking for Jesus in our midst will we experience the power and help he can bring.

These disciples knew that the tomb was empty but didn't understand that Jesus had risen, and they were filled with sadness. Despite the women's witness earlier in the day, which was verified by the other disciples, and despite the biblical prophecies of this very event, they still didn't believe.

The Emmaus story emphasises the importance of prophesy. After the two disciples had explained their sadness and confusion, Jesus responded by going to Scripture and applying it to his ministry. Jesus re-introduced these disciples to the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is the thread woven through all the Scriptures, the central theme that binds them together.

So, which parts of our faith stories do we want Jesus to help us to make sense of? We too are invited to listen to the exposition of the Bible, to have our hearts burning within us as fresh truth is revealed to us. Like those two disciples – only when we see the Old Testament as reaching its natural climax in Jesus will we have understood it. Equally too, we need to understand that it is Jesus himself as the one to whom Scripture points. In John's Gospel we read that '[the Word](#)

became flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.' [John 1. 14]

Jesus still wants the disciples to take the lead whilst he is with them even though there was clearly no pre-arrangement for him to stay. And so, it's the disciples who urge Jesus strongly to 'stay with them' [24. 29] – even before they recognised him.

*At the disciples' home.*

Over the last few weeks, we have found ourselves in a situation needing us to stay where we are. But our homes can still be places where we are the Body of Christ, where we can still be witnesses of hope and joy in the Resurrection. We have indeed been sharing our witness as a Christian community through social media for several weeks now. Easter joy in lockdown is certainly a unique situation for us all. Wherever we are today, Jesus is with us too.

During Lent I was reading Magdalen Smith – The Grace-filled Wilderness – 'A Journey Through Lent'. In the concluding 'After Easter' section she wrote these particular words about hope:

'Sometimes, when we feel overwhelmed with anxiety or by the size of a problem, we are unable to see where the solution might lie and are temporarily blinded by depression, as the disciples are. But it is through communication that eyes begin to open and spirits are restored.

Hope often arises in times of great depression and despondency. True hope cannot be implemented without the energy of Christ, which many people are pulled and pushed by even if they cannot name the power of Jesus within it. Through the opening of Scripture and the

breaking of bread they come to recognise Christ in their lives. This re-energises them to follow through with the vision Christ shared and advocated during his earthly life.'

So, can we imagine ourselves sitting at the table in the house with the disciples and Jesus?

The disciples only recognize Jesus when he takes, blesses, breaks and gives them the bread. These are the same actions that happen at every celebration of the eucharist. Luke shows Jesus attending meals [e.g. [22.14-38 Last Supper](#) and [Acts 10.41 post Resurrection](#)] and the table provides a key gathering place for the church.

Though we have not been able to receive Holy Communion physically for some time, we can give thanks that we can be in spiritual communion with Jesus. We have likewise been invited to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Although the two disciples were not present at the Last Supper, Jesus' actions were typical of the way he had always broken bread with them. This simple meal points forward to the breaking of bread which quickly became the central symbolic action of Jesus' followers.

Scripture and sacrament, word and meal, are joined tightly together, here as elsewhere. Together they are the centre of Christian living. The Emmaus story speaks of an event that is contemporary with every age. Jesus, unrecognised, travels with his church on its pilgrimage and in its perplexity. Its heart is warmed as it hears the Scriptures [[24. 32](#)], but Jesus himself is discerned in 'the breaking of the bread' [[24. 35](#)].

Let us allow Jesus' love to burn within our hearts as he stays with us. The road to Emmaus was just the beginning. Hearing Jesus' voice in Scripture, knowing him in the breaking of bread, is the way for the rest of our lives.

Amen.