

Walmsley Worship

Thursday 27th April, 2017

GOSPEL READING Luke 24:13-35

The Walk to Emmaus

SERMON

Stories of an empty tomb are not all that compelling. Empty can mean a lot of things. Stolen evidence? Taunt or trick? Death or absence?

Which is why Cleopas and his friend remain sad. The best they can say is that the women had some idle tale of angels proclaiming tomb empty and Jesus alive. But they did not see him.

Which is how this story begins for those going to Emmaus.

Is Jesus altered so that his body can't be recognised? Or is the hope of these two barely with enough flicker for light to shine?

Like empty tomb, the Scriptures tease through lack of detail. We are simply told that their eyes were kept from recognising him.

What are your eyes like? Not your physical ones – but the eyes that invite you to see and marvel at divine mystery.

This is a story of invitation to see far deeper than the physical world.

As they travel to Emmaus, they tell a stranger the sad tale of love lost, of hope all but gone. But in the telling a spark can be seen.

Because in the telling they witness to the story of God that is bigger than their personal grief. And so words point beyond:

Jesus of Nazareth; prophet mighty in word and deed; condemned; we had hoped he was the one to redeem; some women of our group astounded us; they did not find his body; vision of angels; said he was alive.

They couldn't believe it! How can you believe it? And yet even their sadness could not hold back a spark of hope that somehow the story of God is bigger than we imagine.

They begin to tell the big story, and once it begins, the stranger with them continues the telling of the story of God.

Didn't our hearts warm ...

Perhaps you have had moments of hearts being warmed. Maybe overwhelming love or grace that was unexpected. Maybe a sense of meaning or purpose igniting a spark within.

But warm hearts, wonderful as they are, do not mean resurrection. They only realise their hearts were warmed once they had eyes to see, but that comes later. But it does move them to invite the stranger in to enjoy their hospitality.

At first Jesus says he will continue on, but they urge him strongly to stay. And in their persistence they invoke the hospitality of God.

So he went in to stay with them.

Dare we be open to moments like this? Often strangers invoke fear or lack of safety in us. Or opening up our homes can be fraught when home is either fortress or sanctuary. Does it need this kind of invitation, or are there other ways in our own lives where we might be open to the hospitality of God? What can we do to be open beyond our sadness or grief? What can we do to allow dull eyes to open more fully? What can we do to sense beyond the warming of our hearts towards an encounter that has divine stamp all over it?

Their hearts were warmed. They invited him in. And he did the rest.

If you or I host a meal, we typically take care of most things. If there is a moment of saying grace before a meal, you might invite the stranger or guest to say that. But you would expect the guest to receive your hospitality rather than create it.

But not our stranger. Not our guest.

Cleopas and friend have now done what they needed. They invited him in. And Jesus takes charge.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him

Every time I hear these words it takes my breath away. Of course this is the moment our eyes would open to him! For here is the hospitality of God. Here is the sharing the gifts of God.

Before Jesus left them to be crucified he gave them something like a secret code. 'Do this in remembrance of me'.

Memory is powerful. Ritual and memory together even more so.

As we eat and drink, we remember and believe. It is not just Cleopas who has his eyes opened. The invocation belongs here as well.

Why should we be surprised that this moment opens eyes? I mean here is the gathered community. Bread is not baked to eat alone. Its breaking is a blessing for sharing.

Why should we be surprised when Jesus has fed crowds and calls us to feed the hungry? Bread is broken that we and all who are hungry are fed by God.

Why should we be surprised when this is the very act that Jesus called his followers to do in remembrance?

Except this is so much more than remembrance. We remember those who are dead, and like the start of the journey, we are sad.

But here eyes are open. We see and know the presence of the risen One.

And didn't our hearts burn while he was with us?

This encounter in the breaking of bread has more power than words can attempt to describe. Among other things, it invites us to see that

strangers on the way may open our eyes to see the risen Christ. That means that any mundane life moment has the power to carry Christ's in-breaking presence to us! We are always in a place where God may surprise us with extraordinary good news.

Christ is risen!