

3rd Sunday of Easter 2020

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread. (Luke 24:28-35)

It's now over a month since we were told that we could no longer meet in our churches for acts of worship. To prevent the spread of the corona virus all gatherings have been suspended, even church gatherings. But we're in the age of technology. We no longer need to be in the same room, same country or even in the same timeframe to gather. We can do it virtually, and I admit, I have enjoyed some of the virtual gatherings I've attended. I've been able to worship in my mother tongue on Sundays for the first time in years. Having said that, I have found it really difficult to get my head round what I think about virtual eucharistic services.

It's something I've been thinking about particularly as I've been reflecting on today's gospel reading. Luke gives an account of two people walking to Emmaus from Jerusalem, returning home after the festival, sunk in despair because the one they'd seen as their saviour had been executed. They were joined by a stranger who walked alongside them as they offloaded and who'd then talked with them about how their scriptures might have led them to expect what had happened. We're not told how they felt about that, whether they took it in or whether it went over their heads. Anyway, they arrived home and as it was getting dark they invited the stranger in, to share a meal and stop over, and all suddenly became clear. As the stranger took bread, blessed it and shared it with them they recognised him as the risen Jesus. That breaking of bread to be shared was the key moment, the moment when they knew Jesus was still part of their lives. The action was a reminder of the Last Supper, perhaps of all the times when meals had been shared – the gospels have many accounts of Jesus sharing meals.

Our eucharistic services draw us into that same moment, a time of sharing. Sharing bread and wine in the presence of risen Lord, with each other, in a tangible and sacramental way and I miss it. Some of you may feel the same. In fact, you may have felt so for some time as our church hasn't been able to offer as many communion services as we used to given the absence of a parish priest. But it's not only the sacrament I miss, it's the gathering as a congregation, sharing our life in Christ with each other as we meet around the communion table. So even though we might be able to come together as a virtual congregation, I, personally, feel a bit bereft.

Reflecting on the reading though, I find myself thinking that that's exactly how the two friends returning to Emmaus must have felt. They had lost not only the one they thought of as their saviour and redeemer but they'd also lost the company of other followers. They were on their own – just the two of them. Yet still Jesus joined them and eventually they realised that they were in his presence. So as we spend this time apart I hope and pray that we'll be able to know that Jesus is here alongside us, in our time alone, as we take our daily walks and as we sit for our meals. Then when we return to our churches we can do so with joy proclaiming that 'The Lord is risen indeed.'