***On Emmaus***

A Sermon for the The Sunday of Easter- Year A

1 Peter 1: 17-23, Luke 24:13-35

When we think of how we normally celebrate Easter Sunday – yes this year has been very different – it is joyful, colourful, triumphant even. After the observance of Lent and especially the solemnity of Holy Week it comes as a particular joy.

Yet amid the candles and joyful hymns we can overlook how tentative, confusing, even fearful the resurrection narratives can be. In the earliest Gospel resurrection narrative, ending at *Mark* 16:8 with the women who went to Jesus’ tomb finding it empty and fleeing in confusion and terror. The last few verses of *Mark* are a later addition and provide a happier ending.

Well there is no fear and terror in today’s Gospel, but confusion, disappointment are there on the trudge to Emmaus.

Let us look at today’s Gospel, two of the disciples set out to Emmaus, some eleven kilometres from Jerusalem. It is a fair walk, and if you walk it with a companion it gives you time to talk, and talk they did. Not about the weather, or the price of lambs in Jerusalem. They talked about the last week, what had happened to Jesus and these wild crazy rumours.

Then somewhere on the way someone joined them and fell in beside them.

There is an etiquette I feel about conversation when travelling, if I sit next to someone on a flight, especially a long one, I say hello and maybe exchange a few words about our respective journeys. What this stranger says seems very forward to me: I certainly would never ask strangers on a train this when I take my seat.

“What were you discussing together …”

Yet they didn’t hold back, here they were telling this stranger all that they had talked about, they were incredulous that this stranger had not heard about Jesus and the strange, confusing things that had happened. They tell him about Jesus and what he had meant to them.

*He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.****20****The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;****21****but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.****22****In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning****23****but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.****24****Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”*

He replies by with a gentle rebuke, they have been “foolish.” He then, we are told, opens to them the Scriptures and explains why what has happened had to happen.

Eventually they come to Emmaus and he makes as if to go on further but it is late, and his companions invite him to join them for a meal and offer a bed for the night.

A while later they share a meal, and this stranger does something unremarkable, ordinary, commonplace. We might say that he says Grace. To be more precise he offer a *berakhot* or blessing for bread and shares the bread among them.

Let’s think about this.

What he did was what would be done every time Jews gathered to share a meal and is still done now. It is in that moment that he is recognised, they see him for who he is, then , as in so many of the resurrection narratives he is gone.

Christians have heard and read this text for centuries with the Eucharist in mind, to me - as a liturgical scholar – I think the text reflects a sense of what the community this gospel was written for was experiencing in the Eucharist as a celebration of resurrection and as something marked by the presence of Jesus.

You might occasionally hear presbyters used prayers very much in the Jewish *berakhot* tradition when bread and wine are presented. “*Blessed are you o Lord our God, king of Creation* ….” Which in a sense hark back to Emmaus.

And that longstanding reading of this text in the light of the Eucharist is true and as someone who holds a fairly *high* understanding of the celebration of the Eucharist and how Jesus is present in it would be the last person to want to detract from that.

But there is another reading, one we often overlook but one I feel has a special resonance in this time when we cannot gather in worship and in celebrating the Eucharist.

We overlook the simplicity, the very ordinariness of the story. These men would have heard this blessing a couple of times already that day, thousands of times over their loves.

They would have heard these words and shared bread. They would have shared in thanks to God and received of God’s providing. How many times had they known bread passed from hand to hand?

Here is something simple and familiar. Here is something which affirms the goodness of God and God’s provision for humanity, here was the equality born of hunger and gratitude. And as they did these simple familiar things it all made sense, they were able to see this stranger for who he is and in seeing him see life as it is.

What can we draw from this in our bubbles, often alone?

Let us reflect on the possibility of the simplest things to show connection and hope, to be our moments when we sense the Christ.

In my time as District Superintendent for Nelson, Marlborough and the West Coast I would often visit retired presbyters. One of whom was in a Nursing home in the later stages of dementia. He would wander around and often appear agitated. What I would do was take him by the hand, he would relax and settle. I think he understood very little of what I said at that point in his illness, but he understood an act of tenderness.

When we can again associate freely, when we can burst our bubbles, let us return to one another and to all those we love with joy and gratitude. Let us rediscover the grace of a smile, a kiss, a hug, a simple warm handshake. Let these be an experience of the conquering of death, an affirmation of and the presence of resurrection.

In the meantime let us treasure what we can to maintain and nurture human connection, the phone calls, the face time, the smiles and hellos to passers by keeping their two metres distance from us.

Let all that nurtures our humanity, which builds connection, which shows us our right relationship with God, with each other and within Creation.

For God is there, in the spaces between us, and there too is Resurrection

May it be so among us Amen

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