

HYMNS: 429 'Alleluia! Jesus is Risen;' 410 'Jesus Christ is Risen Today;' 413 'The day of Resurrection;' 433 'Haven't you heard that Jesus is Risen'

READING: Luke 24; 13 – 35

Have you ever failed to recognise someone you know? It happens to most of us at some point or another. Perhaps it's someone we haven't seen for a long time, or someone that we are meeting out of context, perhaps it is just someone who has changed their appearance. But what excuse could the disciples have had for not recognising Jesus. It was only a matter of days since they had seen him. Yet, here we have our gospel story this morning, telling us that two of the disciples were out on the road to Emmaus, Jesus came and walked with them, talked with them – and they didn't recognise him. What excuse could they have had – the very obvious excuse – the last time they had seen Jesus he had been hanging dead on a cross. You don't expect dead men walking – you don't expect dead men talking either.

For the disciples, for all Jesus followers, the crucifixion brought the end of a dream. They had believed that Jesus just might be the Messiah. They had invested their time, their energy, their hopes in him – but the dream had died. We know a bit about the death of dreams don't we. Fifty one years ago, the Civil Rights movement in America felt it had seen the dream die, with the assassination of Martin Luther King.

Undoubtedly, this period of lockdown has seen many dreams die. Small businesses and restaurants and larger businesses too, have collapsed and taken the hopes and dreams of people with them.

We know what it is to have a dream die at a personal level too. It may be as simple as the dream of travel, or as complex as the dream of a permanent relationship, it may be the dream of having a child, or a grandchild, the dream of a fulfilling career. In our youth we often favour the big dreams – the dreams of changing the world, dreams of world peace or of ending poverty, of finding a cure for a serious illness, of becoming a famous actor – perhaps the saddest part of ageing is if we ever let go of the big

dreams. Our dreams are not just for ourselves of course – we have dreams for our friends, our families.

But we know what it is do have a dream die and then most of us, just want to retreat, to find a place to lick our wounds and come to terms with what has happened. Those two disciples were making their way out of Jerusalem – away from the scene of that dreadful crucifixion. They are walking towards Emmaus, its name means warm wells or warm springs. We, too, try to find a place, an Emmaus, to run to when we have lost hope or don't know what to do, the place of escape, of forgetting, of giving up, of deadening our senses and our minds and maybe our hearts, too. One famous preacher said that for many of us Emmaus is not a place but a state of mind. "Emmaus may even be going to church on Sunday." Being in church may be just an escape from a dream that has died.

So the disciples went to Emmaus, believing that they were moving away, leaving behind a dead Lord. It is one of the ironies of our present post modern age, that many people believe they are leaving behind a dead Lord. They believe that the world is moving on from Christianity – that religion has had its day. They recognise that Christianity is a big dream – a huge hope for the world – but they judge it to have failed, the dream has died and it is time to move on.

Well the disciples made their way towards Emmaus and we know what happened next. They fell in with a stranger and got talking to him. They talked about all that had happened. They poured out the history of their failed dream into the ears of a sympathetic listener. They told their stories of Jesus, of what he had been, of what he had done, of what he had meant to them.

The stranger, walking alongside them, heard their stories, he took them, and he looked at these stories in the light of Scripture. The stranger talked to the disciples about their stories and about Holy Scripture, he got them to look at their own stories, in the light of God's story. He made them see, not just their own little bit of a story, but God's bigger story.

I have in my home a print of a painting of the Isle of Cumbrae in the Clyde. It was the place where I spent all my childhood holidays and it is a place very close to my heart. The print always seems washed out and a bit insipid but I haven't got rid of it because my mother had the same print and its colours always seemed much more vibrant. It is the same print – hers was in a different mount and frame and it transformed the picture. One day I'll have mine reframed, so that it's colour comes to the fore again. And that was what the stranger did for these disciples, he took their story of hurt and failure and reframed it, in God's story – and the reframing transformed it from failure into something new and hopeful.

The stranger made the disciples look at their situation from a different perspective. Maybe everything that happened wasn't a terrible mistake after all, he suggested. Maybe Jesus' death had been part of God's plan all along. Moreover, maybe God wasn't yet finished with Jesus' followers but was just beginning with them.

Sometimes that can help us at a personal level too. We think of a situation or an event which has hurt us or caused us to lose hope. Sometimes though, hearing of that same event or situation from someone else, seeing it through their eyes can bring our healing. When the disciples got to their destination, the stranger broke bread before them, and they saw him, too, in a new light, recognizing him as Jesus himself. They hurried back to Jerusalem with a new message of hope for Jesus' other companions. Sometimes when a dream dies, it does so only to allow a greater dream to be born in its place. After all, would any of those who watched Martin Luther King's assassination forty years ago have believed that the United States would ever have had a Black president?

A plant withers and dies and drops a seed into the ground, only to see a rejuvenated plant grow in its place. These two travellers are you and I; they are the Church walking with Christ the long road of history. May we too have our eyes opened by Jesus, so that we see the hope beyond.

Lord, we know you are alive! Walk with us on our journey of faith and help us to always seek you out, to recognize your face, to keep our hope alive and remember you by sharing together.

Lord, you walk down the streets of cities, towns and villages across the world. We pray today for those with whom you walk, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Syria, in Yemen. May you be recognised as you bring healing and hope.

Lord, you walk down the corridors of suffering and pain, meeting with those who are lonely, comforting those who are grieving, helping those who are sick in mind or body. May you be recognised as you bring healing and hope

Lord, you journey to Emmaus, with those for whom a dream has died, or a love has been betrayed, or a vision has collapsed. May you be recognised as you bring healing and hope.

Lord, you dance with us when we travel in joy and thanksgiving. We give thanks for all who are celebrating today – the gift of new life, a fresh start, or a new perspective. You celebrate too with those of us who are just glad to be alive today.

Lord, we thank you for walking with us, through the day to dayness of our restricted lives – we know that there is no place that we can go, where you are not already there
Hear our prayers in Jesus name. Amen