**COVENANT COMMUNITY ONLINE WORSHIP**

*Presenter: Calvin T Samuel*

**3rd Sunday of Easter**

*Sunday, 26th April 2020*

**~ Did not our Hearts burn within us? ~**

**Welcome & Introduction**:

Good Morning and welcome to this covenant community online service for the Third Sunday of Easter.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

My name is Calvin Samuel and I’m Methodist minister for the towns of Rochford and Rayleigh in the County of Essex. We are internationally dispersed because of the global pandemic but we come together in worship as a covenant community.

The encounter between Jesus and the disciples on the road to Emmaus is one of my favourite Easter stories. In many ways it’s a story of a loss of hope. They had hoped that Jesus was Messiah; had hoped that under his rule and reign things would be different; had hoped that they were living in auspicious times, privileged to witness the last days; had hoped they were seeing in their lifetime the things that had been promised. They had hoped…. But they hoped no longer for the object of their hopes, three days earlier, had been cruelly mocked, beaten, humiliated and crucified.

The resurrection of Jesus demonstrated that their hopes had not been misplaced. The one who was mocked as King of the Jews demonstrated by his resurrection that he is indeed King, not of Jews only, but all creation.

Our first hymn proclaims that kingship: Crown him with many crowns.

**Hymn: Crown him with many crowns** (StF 347)

Crown him with many crowns

The Lamb upon His throne;  
Hark! how the heav’nly anthem drowns  
All music but its own!  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
Of Him who died for thee,  
And hail Him as thy chosen King  
Through all eternity.

﻿Crown him the Son of God,

Before the worlds began;

And ye who tread where he has trod,

Crown him the Son of Man,

Who every grief has known

That wrings the human breast,

And takes and bears them for his own,

That all in him may rest.

﻿Crown him the Lord of life,

﻿Who triumphed o’er the grave,

And rose victorious in the strife

For those he came to save.

His glories now we sing,

Who died, and rose on high;

Who died, eternal life to bring,

And lives, that death may die.

Crown Him the Lord of heaven,  
Enthroned in Worlds Above

Crown him the King to whom is given

The wondrous name of Love

All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
For Thou hast died for me;  
Thy praise shall never, never fail  
Throughout eternity.

*﻿Matthew Bridges (1800–1894) & Godfrey Thring (1823–1903)*

**PRAYERS**

Let us pray.

Gracious God, forgive us

when we fail to discern you walking alongside us

even though our hearts are set ablaze.

When all seems dark, enable us still to hope

in your Son who brings victory out of defeat,

life out of death and hope out of despair.

And when our faith is insufficient,

by your Spirit help us in our unbelief

to hold on until that day when

faith becomes sight. **Amen**.

**SCRIPTURE**

Luke 24 records the story of the journey to Emmaus during which Jesus talks with two disciples who for some reason initially do not recognise him. Yet despite failing to know who he was, their hearts burned within them as the stranger talked with them on the road and opened up the scriptures to them. So let us hear now from Holy Scripture from Luke chapter 24. Fletcher will read for us this week. Perhaps I shouldn’t have talked about his hair. You’ll see why in a moment. I’m blaming it on lockdown…

**Luke 24.13–36**

*Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad.*

*Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.*

*Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”*

*Then Jesus said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.*

*As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. 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; and he vanished from their sight.*

*They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”*

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

**Everyone needs Compassion**

Everyone needs compassion

A love that's never failing  
But let mercy fall on me  
Well everyone needs forgiveness  
The kindness of a Saviour  
The hope of nations

*Saviour, he can move the mountains  
My God is Mighty to save  
He is Mighty to save  
Forever author of salvation  
He rose and conquered the grave  
Jesus conquered the grave*

So take me as You find me  
All my fears and failures  
And fill my life again  
I give my life to follow  
Everything I believe in  
And now I surrender

*Saviour…*

*Shine your light and let the whole world see  
We're singing for the glory of the risen King*

*Saviour…*

*Benjamin David Fielding & Reuben Timothy Morgan*

**The Sermon**

The story of the encounter on the road to Emmaus is unique to Luke’s account of the resurrection. We find details here that simply don’t appear anywhere else. One of those is the name of one of the two disciples, Cleopas, which doesn’t turn up anywhere else in scripture. It’s striking that only one of the disciples is named. Does Luke not know the name of the other? Or is it intentional that the other disciple is unnamed to allow us the reader to imagine ourselves into the story as that unnamed disciple.

Whatever Luke’s motives Cleopas in this story has his moment. Jesus joins them as they’re talking on the road. Rather than dismissing the stranger, Cleopas engages him in their conversation. Here they were reeling after the events of that weekend, dealing with their grief, disappointment, shock, confusion and loss of hope. Who has time to talk some ‘eejot’ stranger who somehow missed the biggest events in the city? Cleopas took the time.

My older brother has a saying that I wish I’d learned from him at an earlier age. ‘Opportunity,’ he says, ‘looks like danger’. In other words, opportunity rarely comes along looking like an opportunity. It looks like other things, calamity, inconvenience, global pandemic, danger. Cleopas took the opportunity, despite his trauma, to talk to this stranger and this wonderful encounter was the result and his name recorded for posterity in scripture.

I wonder, what opportunities might we be missing right now because we are too traumatised by what is happening to us to be attentive to what God might want to us to learn as we journey along the road of our current crisis? We as a church I believe have some things that we need to learn in these challenging days. I pray we can listen together.

And speaking of journey it’s striking that this encounter happens as they go along the road. We don’t know where Emmaus is. Archaeologists and historians have never been able to locate that village. Luke tells us it’s about 7 miles away. Assuming they’re walking and talking at about 2 miles per hour, it’s a 3½ hour journey. That journey is their transformation. They set off from Jerusalem bruised, broken and perplexed. But as they journeyed along Jesus unpacks scripture for them and opens their understanding so that the events of Easter are perceived differently and, therefore, they become different. The things that happen to us we can’t change. But we can change our perception of them and that shift in perception might just change us.

What I love about this journey is that it is absolutely not about the destination. There’s nothing for them in Emmaus. They get there. They share a meal. Jesus is made known to them in the breaking of the bread. That very same evening they get up and go straight back to Jerusalem. The destination was not the point. It was the journey that mattered. I like this reminder that the gradual transformation of Christian discipleship does not only happen when you go somewhere special, on pilgrimage or whatever. Some of the greatest journeys of discipleship occur on the road of daily life.

Part of the reason for this is that many of us are like Cleopas and the other disciple. Jesus rebuked them. How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe? That could be a description of me. Foolish and slow of heart to believe. Some people, they get the whole Christian spiritual growth idea like that. They just get it. And then there are the rest of us. Foolish and slow of heart to believe. Cleopas is the patron saint of people like us. There is space in God’s economy for plodders. We plodders, though, need to be like Cleopas, open to the scriptures, willing to engage with apparent time wasters, and to offer radical hospitality. Cleopas and his friend didn’t know who this stranger was, but they did know it was late and that they should offer him a meal before he continued on his journey. So they did. And Christ was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

We Christians rightly hear a eucharistic reference here. But I remind you that at this point Holy Communion, the Eucharist, had not yet been invented. This breaking of bread was the sharing of hospitality with someone in need and in that moment Christ became visible.

One of the real challenges and frustrations for us at the moment is that there are many who are in need around us, but social distancing makes it so very difficult to find ways of offering our help. Let me say to you persist. Find the new opportunities to be present to those in need as far as we can be, and in so doing Christ will be made visible.

The final thing to notice is that pesky disappearing act of Jesus. As Jesus is made known in the breaking of bread it is then, precisely, that he vanishes before them. For 3½ hours when they didn’t know who he was Jesus engaged them in conversation which set their hearts ablaze. But now that they stopped, washed their hands, presumably for 20 seconds, had a meal prepared and then eaten, Jesus vanished before them. Later that night Jesus reappears in Jerusalem as they are telling their story to the Eleven.

I’m not sure what to make of this, except to say that I recognise it in my own life. I recognise the apparent to-ing and fro-ing of the presence of Jesus. I say, apparent, because, of course, Jesus never leaves nor forsakes us. Yet at the same time, our experience all too often feels like that. You’re probably familiar with the famous poem *Footprints*. At our worst points in life there appear to be only one set of footprints. Jesus seems absent. Only later do we discover that he was carrying us.

Partly, this experience of absence may be explained by our own shortcomings. We are slow of heart to believe and therefore fail to see the presence of Christ in our lives. Partly, I think it’s part of the challenge of spiritual growth. Tracking the presence of God’s free wind of the Spirit is tricky because we only see glimpses. Therefore, it is to be expected that there are moments when God in Christ appears by his Spirit to be beyond our perception. Like trying to watch a bird in flight among bushes. We can’t always see it, even though it’s there. And partly I think it’s divine design. God is mystery and divine revelation is always an act of grace. That apparent absence and presence, the disappearing and reappearing of Jesus, is part of God’s gracious revelation.

The disciples didn’t simply fail to recognise Jesus. They were kept from recognising him, presumably because it suited God’s plan and purpose. So we see a three part complexity. Their failure to recognise Jesus is partly their shortcoming, being slow of heart to believe, partly the nature of discipleship, divine insight often comes slowly and partly by divine design God chose to keep their eyes from recognising him until he was ready graciously to grant them revelation.

If nothing else, this story of the road to Emmaus is an invitation always to remain open to God. We can never tell when God in Christ, by his Spirit may choose to make an appearance as we journey along the Way. Amen.

**Prayers –** *Let us pray.*

Gracious God,

We pray for all who are finding life hard today;

that they may know your joy in their distress,

your hope in their despair,

your healing and comfort in their grief,

and your rest for all who feel weary.

Transform us by your grace

That times of testing

may become times of endurance;

and times of endurance

become times of maturing,

and times of maturing

a source of your joy in the midst of our distress.

For all who struggle to make sense of this world,

all who feel left behind or abandoned,

all who wrestle with temptation today

and all whose situation feels far from joyous

draw near and bring healing and hope.

As we pray the prayer our Saviour taught us,

we bring before God all who are struggling with the new realities of life imposed upon by the global pandemic, in particular our emergency services and healthcare professionals and those providing essential services.

We draw all our prayers together in the prayer that Jesus gave us

in its modern form:

**Our Father in heaven,**

**hallowed be your Name,**

**your kingdom come, your will be done,**

**on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins,**

**as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial**

**and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,**

**now and forever. Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

The walk to Emmaus was a journey of transformation. That journey has become a metaphor for a deepening understanding of the scriptures and deepening discipleship. Easter is an invitation to invitation to go deeper. We will not be satisfied to wade about in the shallows. We want to launch out into the deep, to grow in faith, even those of us who are plodders, slow of heart to believe. My prayer is that you will discover by God’s Spirit that there is far more to this faith journey than you have so far discovered. Our final hymn expresses that desire: There must be more than this.

**There must be more than this**

There must be more than this

O, breath of God, come breathe within  
There must be more than this  
Spirit of God, we wait for You  
Fill us anew we pray  
Fill us anew we pray

*Consuming fire, fan into flames  
A passion for Your name  
Spirit of God, would You fall in this place  
Lord, have Your way  
Lord have Your way with us*

Come like a rushing wind

Clothe us with power from on high  
Now set the captives free  
Leave us abandoned to Your praise  
Lord, let Your glory fall  
Lord, let Your glory fall.

*Tim Hughes*

**THE BLESSING**

God the Father,

by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead,

strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life;

and may almighty God bless you,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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