

Sermon for 19th April 2026, Easter 3, Year A

Preached at St John's Baillieston

Luke 24:13-35

Sermon

Why these two disciples were travelling the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, we are not told. Perhaps after the crucifixion of Jesus in Jerusalem, they simply couldn't stand the disappointment and had to get away. Cleopas and the other disciple who is unnamed have had their faith shattered.

Everything had seemed to be going so well. Jesus was growing in popularity and number of followers. Many even among the leaders of the nation were fascinated by him and invited him to meals and meetings. The people of Jerusalem loved him, even though he was a small-town country preacher from up north in Galilee. There seemed no doubt that very shortly, Jesus would become king and under his just and wise rule, the Jews would throw off Roman oppression and begin a new era of freedom, justice, and mercy, just as the prophets had foretold.

And then suddenly it all goes to hell. Jesus is arrested, condemned, executed. The powers that be make a terrifying example of him. Most of Jesus' community of disciples flee in fear. Perhaps Cleopas and his companion are among them. All their hopes for the future of their society are crushed.

What are they longing for now as they walk to Emmaus? Their community is scattered, each to their own homes. Even those that still meet together have to do so in secret. Perhaps after the crisis all they really want is to get back to some kind of normality. Were they perhaps fishermen or shepherds before all this started? Maybe they're heading back to those jobs, back to the comfort of how things used to be. Maybe they were dreaming of a wonderful future, but now

they'll do anything to get away from the despair and the overwhelming sense of loss. Maybe business as usual wasn't so bad after all.

It's into this situation that the resurrected Jesus steps. Jesus isn't interested in things going back to normal. He also doesn't seem to be interested in instantly fixing everyone's problems. Jesus has chosen not to be king, but instead chooses to walk alongside and with people who are suffering. This is the God whom Jesus reveals to us, not a God who instantly fixes the world, but our fellow-sufferer on the road.

Jesus walks with the travellers and begins to draw them towards a different sort of perspective. He takes their isolation and despair and begins to invite them and us into a different sort of community – not the old community based on self-sufficiency and rules and polite etiquette, but something new, something rooted in our own vulnerability, in accepting one another's weakness, and more importantly in accepting our own. Jesus wants us to recognise that we really do need one another to be truly whole.

Cleopas's companion on the road is not named, so it's easy and perhaps helpful to imagine that this companion is us. Many of us are walking on that road to Emmaus right now. We have been metaphorically scattered by illnesses and bereavements, and by ever-rising costs of living caused by mad leaders across the world who seem motivated only by hate and greed. Many of us are living in a vague (or not-so-vague) permanent sense of trauma, fearful of spiralling fuel & food costs, of whatever the next crisis brings our way like a series of hurricanes, each arriving before the last one has even finished with its own destruction.

Clearly the power of the resurrected Jesus is not a power that fixes all our problems, but it is a power that invites us to see the world differently, from the perspective of an invincible love, faith, and hope rooted in vulnerability rather than control.

The two travellers on the road could not fully hear or understand Jesus' message when they were full of self-confidence and certainty. Now they are nervous, doubtful, uncertain, and suddenly they are truly able to see him. Jesus defeats their intellectual arguments by revealing himself - the presence of the divine love in the mundane - as he breaks bread. All at once they gasp and realise "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?" All their hopes and plans had gone to hell, but in the middle of their vulnerability their hearts had been opened wide, and a vision of a new hope had appeared.

They react just like everyone who has truly encountered God's love in the midst of their distress. They must tell someone about it! They must talk to someone who will understand – someone who gets it. Whatever normality they were planning to get back to is quickly forgotten. They have walked seven miles to Emmaus and now it's nearly night, but they don't care – they set off back to Jerusalem that same hour.

It's not that they're now reverting to plan A. Jesus hasn't arrived to say, "hey, don't give up – things will get back to normal soon!" He's relying on things never being normal again. All those people who were following Jesus because they thought he was going to fix everything from the top down like a perfect government, now in the middle of their despair they've realised one thing – that they themselves are the embodiment of God's love, the body of Christ. Christ is within us, not to fix our problems while leaving us unchanged, but to utterly transform how we experience the world and each other.

We are transformed most powerfully not when all is well, but when we are lost in the middle of our weakness. In our vulnerability and our fear, our minds are terrified, but our hearts are opened. We realise then how much we truly need one other.

It's often been said that when Jesus washed his disciples' feet on the evening of the Last Supper, he was teaching us that we must be humble and serve one

another. But is it perhaps possible that he was also teaching us the importance of vulnerability, the importance of allowing others to truly see our pain? Never does Jesus praise the stiff upper lip. 'Blessed are those who weep,' he says, 'for they shall be comforted.'

We are all desperate for things to get back to normal; we've been waiting for years, maybe even decades. I wonder when the last 'normal' was for you, in the days when everything seemed stable and life was gradually improving? For me, I think, perhaps, it was 2014. But God always has a different sort of normal in mind, one where the peace of God that passes all understanding is rooted within us, which can only emerge when we accept that all our best coping plans have failed, our stiff upper lip quivers with emotion, and we accept, finally, that we were made for each other, and that none of us can make it through by insisting that we can do this all on our own.