

Sermon Easter 3, year A

The story we know as the Emmaus story is about the surprising and mysterious and certain presence of Christ, the presence of God, even in our darkest and most disorienting hours. I am not ashamed to admit that there have been times in my life when I haven't walked Christ. It would be truer to say that I have walked in the opposite direction. I have been in some very dark places, where I was unable to see God or sense the presence of Jesus. I believe It is in a similar place that the two disciples walking along the road to Emmaus must have found themselves on that first Easter Sunday.

Nothing makes any sense. They have witnessed the arrest, torture and the crucifixion of their Lord and Master. They are completely and utterly devastated. Their hope has been totally shattered and nailed to the cross. "They had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel" writes Luke. If you remember I mentioned in my sermon on Palm Sunday that life was very difficult for the Jews who were ruled by the Romans and all their hopes were pinned Jesus rescuing them. Now that Jesus is dead, there is no way this is going to happen, or so it seems to the disciples. Then they heard rumours that Jesus body isn't in the tomb and that Jesus has risen and is alive. Apparently, angels appeared to some women telling them He is alive. How can this be so, it is totally unbelievable? Hysterical nonsense in fact. In the Gospel reading we heard "But these

words seemed like an idle tale and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:13) It was impossible for them to believe that the man they had seen die on Good Friday was walking around on Sunday. It adds to their confusion and great sadness. They don't know what to believe anymore. It is simply too hard for them to accept that Jesus is alive.

It seems there is nothing else for the disciples to do, other than return to Emmaus. Emmaus is seven miles away and feeling as they do, it is a bit of a trudge. It's a wilderness road and they are not only physically but mentally on that wilderness road. They are trying to sort out in their minds all that they have witnessed in the past week. As they talk to each other, asking, questioning, wondering what they are going to do next, how are they supposed to carry on without Jesus at their side, a stranger joins them. They don't recognise this stranger

I have two questions to ask here, Firstly, why did they not recognise Jesus? After all they have, spent the last three years with Him. It seems almost impossible that they wouldn't recognise him. I wonder if the disciples are too pre-occupied with their own grief and sorrow to really notice who the stranger was walking beside them. Their life has been thrown into disarray and they do not know what the future holds for them, and are more than likely scared. Secondly, Jesus must have been aware of the suffering that these two disciples were going through. Why doesn't He relieve them of their suffering and

reveal to them who He really is? If Jesus had done so, they would have been put out of their misery and there would have been much rejoicing. According to Luke 24 :16 their eyes were prevented from recognizing Jesus. They didn't have the eyes to see what clearly should have been visible.

The two disciples just didn't get it. They couldn't perceive how they were going to meet with Jesus again. Jesus gave them a helping hand, and "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke24:27). In other words, Jesus reviewed the entire history of Israel from the time of the Exodus to His own resurrection, highlighting God's plan for the Messiah.

As they approached Emmaus, it was almost evening and the two disciples did right by urging the stranger to stay with them. It is only when Jesus accepted this offer and he broke bread with them, much like he did at the feeding of the 5,000 and the Last Supper (Luke 9:16; 22:19), that they realised that Jesus was actually with them. Once their eyes were opened to the reality and implications of the resurrection, Jesus became visible to their physical eyes.

Life happens, life isn't always fair, life doesn't always go the way we expect or want it to. We have sorrow, confusion, disillusionment. There is no better example of this than to look at the current situation that the world finds itself in today. None

of us a few months ago could have imagined a virus would send the world into lockdown creating a panic stricken and fearful world. Life happens good or bad and whether we realise it or not or don't even want acknowledge it, Christ draws near, he is beside us all the way. The disciples couldn't perceive how they were going to meet with Jesus again, but their eyes were opened. I am sure many of us have been in situations, the deep dark place I mentioned at the start where we can't even begin to perceive how we are going to meet with Jesus again.

Emmaus is wherever we encounter the risen and living Christ. We are on the road of life, the road of faith. We are constantly on the road to Emmaus. And Christ speaks to all of us on our journey: I am with you. Fear not.

