

## **PREACHING Easter 3 Luke 24: 13-35 The PRESENCE OF THE RISEN CHRIST**

In Saint Matthew's Gospel, Ch 18 v20, Jesus is recorded as telling his followers that 'wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.' I've often thought that today's Gospel Reading, the famous story of the encounter between the risen Christ and two disciples on the road to Emmaus from Luke chapter 24, (this morning's reading) is a sort of enacted parable or commentary of that saying: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.'

The story of the meeting on the road to Emmaus is all about how disciples can discover the presence of the risen Christ in their lives, where and how they can both meet and recognise their Risen Lord.

First of all, the disciples meet with the Risen Christ while they are gathered together. Jesus joins not just one of his followers, but two, and two ordinary followers at that, not leaders of the disciples. All we know for certain is that one of the two was a man named Cleopas.

The two disciples were joined by the Risen Christ on the road to Emmaus on the first Easter day and were both witnesses to Jesus' death, which makes their failure to recognise him all the more remarkable. The crucial thing, however, is that Cleopas and the other disciple met Jesus as they journeyed along TOGETHER, not individually.

And the same goes for us.

As we meet with the Risen Christ, we discover his presence, as we meet together.

The church is always corporate. It's not a matter of 'Me and my God'. But always a matter of 'Our God and us'. Christ makes himself known in the gathering of the people.

Then Cleopas and the other disciple discovered the presence of the risen Christ in Jesus' patient explaining to them of the scriptures. On reflection they realised that their hearts had burnt within them as the stranger had drawn them to the sacred words on the road, and that burning of their hearts was, for them, a sign that it had been Christ who had been present with them.

And the same goes for us. We too meet with the Risen Christ, we too discover his presence in the scriptures, as we read them and as we hear them read and explained to us by way of sermons.

It's worth remembering that most of the books now contained in the Bible weren't written to be read individually and privately, but to be read out loud and heard and listened to, corporately. Cleopas and the other disciple HEARD the scriptures and Jesus' preaching of those scriptures.

It's the same today. Jesus Christ makes himself known to us in the proclaiming of the Word.

And then Cleopas and the other disciple discovered the presence of the Risen Christ when, at the house in the evening, Jesus broke the bread before them. It was at that moment that their eyes were opened and they recognised him. And the action of Jesus was clearly a re-enactment of the Last Supper, and was the second ever celebration of the Eucharist.

And the same, once again, goes for us. We too meet with the Risen Christ, we discover his presence with us, in the celebration of the Eucharist, the Holy Communion, in the taking, blessing, breaking and sharing of the bread and of the cup. Christ Jesus makes himself known to us in the breaking of the bread.

Cleopas and his companion met with the Risen Christ in each other, in the scriptures and in the Eucharist. And so do we. And we need all three - Others, the Bible and the Holy Communion for that meeting to take place most truly, because they are what make the Church and make her worship.

If we look at the Holy Communion service as a whole, we find that those three things are reflected in it. The service begins with 'The Gathering, where the focus is on looking for Jesus Christ in each other, an emphasis repeated later, at the Peace.

The next section is, 'The Liturgy of the Word', where the focus is on looking for Christ in the reading and the sermon on the scriptures.

The final section is 'The Liturgy of the Sacrament', where the focus is on seeking Jesus Christ in the bread and the wine.

It's hard to think of worshipping 'together' today at this time when the COVID-19 pandemic enforces our isolation. Some can worship as couples or families: many are worshipping physically alone. However, we remain part of one faith community. We share together in our prayers, our reading and reflection on Scripture, our affirmation of faith, and, if at a distance, our fellowship. It's hard to think of sharing in Holy Communion when we are not able to partake of consecrated bread and wine. However, through penitence and faith, honestly seeking God and desiring the presence of the Holy Spirit, we remain part of the one body and partake of the one Spirit. Nevertheless, we long for the day when we can once more gather together in person, and when we can once more eat and drink the bread and wine, tokens of his overwhelming love.

Meanwhile, the main facts remain the same: we come to give glory and worship to God, and not to make ourselves 'feel better'. It remains true that we should expect our hearts to burn within us as we gather (remotely) to hear the scriptures and be challenged and transformed by the word of God. As we do that, it seems to me, we see one of the signs that we have discovered the presence of the Risen Christ with us and within us.

May God grant that it may be so, that our hearts may burn within us as we worship together, not just today, but always. Amen