

READINGS FOR SUNDAY 26 APRIL 2020 – THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Psalm 116.1-7

- 1 I love the Lord,
for he has heard the voice of my supplication; ♦
because he inclined his ear to me
on the day I called to him.
- 2 The snares of death encompassed me;
the pains of hell took hold of me; ♦
by grief and sorrow was I held.
- 3 Then I called upon the name of the Lord: ♦
'O Lord, I beg you, deliver my soul.'
- 4 Gracious is the Lord and righteous; ♦
our God is full of compassion.
- 5 The Lord watches over the simple; ♦
I was brought very low and he saved me.
- 6 Turn again to your rest, O my soul, ♦
for the Lord has been gracious to you.
- 7 For you have delivered my soul from death, ♦
my eyes from tears and my feet from falling.

**Glory, to the Father, and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

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Acts 2.14a and 36-41

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them:

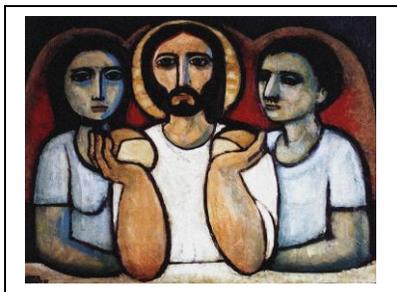
'Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?' Peter said to them 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.' And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Luke 24.13-35

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 recognising 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 he 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 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 our hearts not 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.



Some thoughts ...

For most of history, it was assumed that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were both men. We know the name of one of them – Cleopas. In more recent times, some Biblical scholars have suggested that the second disciple might well be his wife, Mary, one of the witnesses to the empty tomb. Even our own Tom Wright believes it is a possibility!

How do they reach this new understanding? Well, in the Gospels we know about “Mary, mother of James” (Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40, 16:1; Luke 24:10), present at the Crucifixion and a witness of the empty tomb, and “Mary, wife of Clopas” (John 19:25), also present at the Crucifixion. “Clopas” it is thought, could possibly be a variant spelling of “Cleopas.” Then we also learn of ‘Alphaeus’—he is mentioned in Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15, and Acts 1:13 as the father of James, and Alphaeus is thought to be the

Aramaic form of the name Cleopas. So, are Cleopas and Mary, father and mother of James, on their way back home from Jerusalem that first Easter day, as evening draws on? The painting suggests it was. I leave it with you to make up your own minds!

Whoever the two disciples were, what does this much-loved encounter with Jesus have to say to us? I think three of the saddest words in the Bible lie here in verse 21 – ***But we had hoped*** ... What loss and grief is summed up in those few words. Hope dashed, hope crumbled, hope undermined by grinding reality – all their beliefs about God being at work are gone. All they have left are the horrendous visual memories of Good Friday, total bewilderment about what has happened and this huge, aching emptiness and loss. Human beings need hope so badly. I think that's why the media are annoying many of us with their persistent questions about when the restrictions will be lifted, when our schools will open again, when small businesses can start back to work, when we can hug our families once more. Yes, I know that a rolling 24-hour news machine requires constant new material, or people start to ignore it – so they push, and push for something new. But at its heart there is something really important here. We need Hope to live, to keep going – we need to trust that there is that light at the end of the tunnel.

What turned the desolation in the hearts of the two companions from darkness to light, lies in their encounter with the mysterious stranger. He doesn't seem initially to offer much comfort does he? *Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe ...!* But then, as he walked and talked with them, he broke open the scriptures for them, he made sense of it all. We have that wonderful testament to what he gave them towards the end of the passage: *Were not our hearts burning with us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?* How wonderful to have Jesus himself leading Bible study for you! It is only as evening draws on and they press him to stay with them, that the moment of complete understanding and recognition comes, as Jesus takes the bread, blesses and breaks it, before giving it to them. They've seen those hands do this before – suddenly they know who it is!

Right now, we need to hold to our Christian hope that love is stronger than death, as never before, not just for ourselves, but for our world. Our hearts ache because we cannot break bread together, nor make our holy communion in the usual way by gathering, offering praise and then sharing bread and wine as Christ's Body in our communities. But what we can do is allow our Risen Lord to draw alongside us in our homes, to help us by guiding our reading of the Holy Scriptures and by asking him to bring us new hope. Prayer on our own at home, or together through new technologies, will open our hearts to the Word. In this time of restrictions and loss, let's ask him to set our hearts on fire in a new way with love and hope.

With my love and prayers ~ God bless and be close to you, Mary-Lou x