

Tarves Parish Church - Sunday 26 April 2020



“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”

Read the following hymn of praise slowly, focussing on the meaning of the words.

CH4 425

1 The Saviour died, but rose again
triumphant from the grave;
and pleads our cause at God's right
hand,
omnipotent to save.

2 Who then can e'er divide us more
from Jesus and his love,
or break the sacred chain that binds
the earth to heaven above?

3 Let troubles rise, and terrors frown,
and days of darkness fall;

through him all dangers we'll defy,
and more than conquer all.

4 Nor death nor life, nor earth nor hell,
nor time's destroying sway,
can e'er efface us from his heart,
or make his love decay.

5 Each future period that will bless,
as it has blessed the past;
he loved us from the first of time,
he loves us to the last.

Bible Reading

St Luke 24:13-35 *The Walk to Emmaus*

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood

still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then 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?' ¹⁹He 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, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But 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. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and 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. ²⁴Some 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.' ²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They 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?' ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Reflection

Recently I came across this poem by A S J Tessimond, who lived through the first part of the last century and all the upheaval caused by two world wars and depression. The poem speaks of a community coming back to life.

DayDream

*One day people will touch and talk perhaps
easily,
And loving be natural as breathing and warm as
sunlight,
And people will untie themselves, as string is unknotted,
Unfold and yawn and stretch and spread their fingers,
Unfurl, uncurl like seaweed returned to the sea,
And work will be simple and swift
as a seagull flying,
And play will be casual and quiet
as a seagull settling,
And the clocks will stop, and no one will wonder
or care or notice,
And people will smile without reason,
Even in winter, even in the rain.*

Although Tessimond died in 1962 that poem carries a particular resonance for today in a world where it seems as if someone has pressed the pause button on real life. And that sense of life at a standstill is felt most acutely by individuals who have lost a loved one. Especially if there is no opportunity to say farewell to that loved one. And it is often in this place of unreality that questions arise. Where is God in all of this? Has God turned his back on the world?

In today's bible reading we return to that first Easter Day. It is getting on in the day. Two of Jesus followers are heading out of Jerusalem towards Emmaus. Weary and confused, angry and grieving, they trudge along the road, heading for home. They are so caught up in the events of the last week that they barely notice the stranger who comes along-side them. Until he asks them what they are talking about. You can picture the scene – where has this guy been? The events of the last week have shocked Jesus friends to the core and brought their lives to a virtual standstill. Surely everyone has heard about Jesus, about his arrest, trial and crucifixion? After all haven't these events dominated the whole Passover celebration in Jerusalem.

But that is not all – some of the women who were followers of Jesus had visited the tomb and found it empty. They came back claiming to have seen a vision of angels – and what is more their story checked out. Peter and John had gone to see for themselves. They came back and confirmed that they had found the tomb empty – no sign of Jesus body.

At this point in the story it is not the presence of the risen Jesus that is key to Luke's Gospel narrative. Indeed it is the opposite – it is Jesus absence, his hiddenness. The empty tomb, the stranger who goes for the meantime unrecognised (and this is not the only resurrection story in which Jesus goes unrecognised) – these things speak of the mystery that lies at the heart of the Christian faith.

In one sense the cross is easier to understand – the identification with pain and suffering; the sacrificial laying down of life for another. We can understand that – even perhaps live into it to some extent. It is the absence, the hiddenness of God, conveyed by the empty tomb and the unknown stranger, which we find harder to accept. Yet it is this seeming absence, this hiddenness that reminds us that God is beyond our human understanding, that God cannot be confined to our ways of knowing and being. God is greater than all of these.

The Eastern Orthodox Church teaches that this hiddenness is an important part of the journey of faith. Yet it is this very unknowing that rescues us from false certainties and rigid fundamentalism. But this way of unknowing is not to be confused with ignorance. Quite the opposite. Luke tells us that for the rest of the journey to Emmaus Jesus treats his blind and bewildered followers to a bible study – explaining everything the Old Testament has to say about himself, about God and God's relationship with the world. And those followers find their hearts quicken. Love and hope and life stir within them. They long to know more. Yet still Jesus' identity remains hidden from them. It is only later as they sit around the table and Jesus takes bread, blesses it and breaks it, that his followers recognise him in that ordinary and everyday event.

The journey towards God will always involve times when it seems as if life has come to a standstill, times when there is a loss of words, of understanding, and of vision of God. There will be times when God seems absent or is hidden. And in those times we are besieged by questions and we ache with longing for God's presence. But it is in that very ache of longing for God, that, in some mysterious way we come alive again to his presence and are able once again continue our journey in faith and hope and love.

So let me leave you with another poem to reflect on,

The Footprints Prayer

One night I had a dream...

*I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord, and
Across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene I noticed two sets
of footprints in the sand; One belonged to me, and the other to the Lord.
When the last scene of my life flashed before us, I looked back at the
footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of my life,
There was only one set of footprints.*

*I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest
and saddest times in my life*

This really bothered me, and I questioned the Lord about it.

"Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,

You would walk with me all the way;

*But I have noticed that during the
most troublesome times in my life,*

There is only one set of footprints.

*I don't understand why in times when I
needed you the most, you should leave me.*

*The Lord replied, "My precious, precious
child. I love you, and I would never,
never leave you during your times of
trial and suffering.*

*When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you.*

Prayers for Others

Suggestions for prayer

- The NHS, its staff in hospitals and GP practices as well as the other emergency services and volunteers
- Scientific researchers engaged in the struggle against Covid-19
- The Government and Scottish Parliament as they seek to manage the pandemic
- Those suffering from or bereaved by the corona virus
- Family, friends and neighbours, those most affected by the lock-down
- Other people and situations who are in your hearts today.
- The Church that we might offer a faithful witness to Christ through this time
- Crossreach and in particular their work with the elderly and vulnerable adults

You might like to close by saying the Lord's Prayer

Our Father,
Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever,
Amen

A Blessing

May God's blessing surround you each day
As you love him and walk in his way
May his presence within guard and keep you from sin
Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

Notices

The minister is available to help with any pastoral emergencies. Tel 851295

If you are aware of anyone experiencing particular difficulty during this time please contact Ruth Tel851887

An urgent assistance appeal newsletter from Crossreach, the Church of Scotland's Social Care Arm. Details are to be found on the website shown below. Please consider giving and pray for their work with the elderly and vulnerable adults at this time.

<https://www.justgiving.com/crossreachchurch/donate>