

## Paul Booth's Sermon

Sunday 26 April 2020

Good morning. How are you? I hope you're keeping well and safe. But it's not easy, is it, the way we're having to live through this Coronavirus pandemic? We're just not used to the isolation, or having to live without human contact. I know that some of you who live alone have to cope with this all the time, and those of us who are privileged enough to have partners and families are catching up with what it feels like to live with that kind of isolation and aloneness. Our hearts go out to you. But it's not easy for any of us. We have lots of questions – how long will it go on? When will it be safe to go and visit friends, to hug a grandchild? We have lots of questions, but not many answers. We'd love to have some answers wouldn't we – but there really are none to be given. None of us knows. We are living with uncertainty, and with the unknown. And we do find that rather difficult don't we? As Christians we should be a bit more used to it than we are because we're called to live by faith and not by sight. Hebrews chapter 11 tells that "faith is the evidence of things not yet seen". But we do find it remarkably difficult!

We serve a Lord who taught in parables, rarely gave a straight answer. You had to work it out for yourself. And the Gospels rarely give us a straight answer either. Today's story of that lovely walk by two disciples from Jerusalem to Emmaus is no different. It doesn't give us answers; but it does give us lots of pattern, lots to draw from for ourselves. And perhaps more this year than any other year it could make more sense to us because it's not just about a journey from a physical place called Jerusalem to another geographical place called Emmaus. It's a journey from shattering, (from shattered lives) to hope; to restoration. It's a journey from disappointment, a journey from disillusionment; a journey from fear to love.

And so it was that the two disciples (Cleopas and a companion) set off bitterly disappointed. "We had hoped that he was to be the one to redeem Israel. We *had hoped*." They were walking on a country lane, not through towns. The route from Jerusalem to Emmaus was a country walk. They were walking along, talking about what had happened, what hadn't happened, what might have happened. And somebody drew alongside them as they were walking along the lane. This 'somebody' was asking questions about what they were talking about, where had they been, and they couldn't believe that this person seemed to know nothing of what they had experienced in Jerusalem.

"Are you the only one not to know what happened?"

"Are you the only one not to know that our friend, Jesus, who was called the Messiah, had died. They killed him. Didn't you know?"

"And then this morning, just this morning, there were some girls who went to the tomb, and they said that his body wasn't there. So now he's not only been killed; his body's been stolen."

And the one that walked alongside them said “You fools! Don’t you know that it says in the Jewish scriptures that this one who was called to be the Messiah was to die and to rise again?”

They carried on walking, and they reached Emmaus. They’d left Jerusalem, the place of disappointment; and we’re disappointed, aren’t we? We have lots of disappointments at the moment. Lots of our things have been cancelled; lots of our lives have been turned inside out and upside down. There is disappointment everywhere we look. I wonder what you might have been doing today? Oh, I know some of you would be in the Cathedral, worshipping God rather than doing it via a screen! But what other things are you disappointed about? I’d have been home for just three days from visiting family in Northern Italy where we planned to spend my wife’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday with the family over there. We were bitterly disappointed when that had to be cancelled and it all fell apart. There will be things that you will have been disappointed about too. Those disciples’ disappointment was achingly difficult.

But they got to Emmaus, and Emmaus became for them a place of enlightenment, a place of renewal. They went into the home, (perhaps it was the home of one of them), and they invited the stranger who had come alongside them to come and have a meal with them because time was getting on. And inside the house, that stranger they’d invited to eat with them became the host. He broke bread. Offered wine. And *then* they recognised him, in the breaking of the bread. As Thomas was to say in another place at another time “My Lord and my God!” The penny dropped, realisation dawned, life was renewed. But Jesus left them. Jesus had done what Jesus needed to do, and he left them. Was that fair? Perhaps not; but what they said to each other was really important. They hadn’t recognised Jesus alongside them on the road, and we need to remember that Jesus is alongside *us* in our disappointments, in our living with uncertainty, living with the unknown through this period of difficulty. Jesus is with us whether we recognise it or not. But they recognised him in the end, and realised ‘hadn’t our hearts burned within us as we were walking along the road with that man?’ They had known - but they just hadn’t recognised it. So Emmaus became for them the place of renewal, the place of enlightenment, whereas Jerusalem had been the place of disappointment, the place of shattering. They had moved. They’d moved with Jesus and Jesus with them.

And so they got up and went straight back to Jerusalem. But they didn’t go back to the Jerusalem they’d left; they didn’t go back to that place of disappointment. They went on to a *new* Jerusalem. They returned to a different Jerusalem, because *they* were different. They had Jesus with them and they knew that. They went to Jerusalem to rejoice with the other disciples. To rejoice in the renewal of life and love because Jesus was risen. Not just risen in that physical sense on resurrection day, but risen in their being, risen in their lives, risen in their very existence because *they were different*. They went back to a different Jerusalem and we too will go to a different land. We will not go back to ‘normal’, whatever ‘normal’ was. We will return to a new way of living, a new way of life with Jesus in our hearts and Jesus in our lives.

May God bless you, and keep you safe and well.