

The two disciples were heading away from Jerusalem on the road to Emmaus just days after Jesus' death, the same day that the women had found the empty tomb and the stone rolled away.

They, like so many of us, were at a loss and despair over what was happening in their world. The horror and shock of the crucifixion had overwhelmed all their hope and threatened to undermine all the teachings of love and compassion that Jesus had instilled into them, they were distraught.

Similarly when we watch the news and see reports of terrorist atrocities, war, racial hatred, refugee crises and so many other things – do we too feel that the teachings of loving everyone and compassion are pointless in the face of all these things? We too can lose hope and be on our own roads to Emmaus.

The two disciples found themselves in deep conversation on the road - but they don't realise it was with Jesus himself. This lack of recognition is not their fault – as verse 16 says “they were kept from recognising him.”

So they shared their version of recent events with him and their disappointment over their hopes being shattered and their confusion about what the women had told them about angels speaking to them at the empty tomb. Jesus very gently rebukes them “how foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”

He also explains all the Old Testament stories from Moses and all the prophets and how they all fully and completely point to the Christ.

He is explaining to them that although things might look hopeless and they might have doubts it was all part of God's plan.

They invited him to stop with them – and finally when they are all relaxed and sitting around the table he breaks bread and shares it with them and then the scales fall from their eyes and they see that it is Jesus.

We must remember that we will not always recognise his presence with us in our toughest of times – but when we look back on the situation we can see that he was there with us as we could not possibly have got through it without him. His hand was there guiding us, bringing others around us and always loving us. One of my favourite verses is Jeremiah 29 verse 11 “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” - and Romans Chapter 8 verse 28 “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him”.

Doing my research for this talk I found that many believe that the fact that Jesus chose to reveal himself at the dinner table was highly significant.

First there is the relaxing nature of being in fellowship together at the table, it is a place of friendship a place where relationships are strengthened - and those of us who attended the Maundy Thursday supper here can attest to this.

And it was during the communion that their eyes were opened – when we take communion in a little while we too will have the opportunity for our hearts and minds to be illuminated as we allow Jesus to reveal himself to each of us and for us to grow closer to him.

Jesus is always available to listen to our concerns. Jesus walks beside all of us each and every day. In fact Gilly reminded us last week by showing us the Footprints poem that when we look back there are sometimes only one set of footprints as he is not just walking with us, but carrying us through our toughest times.

And each time we open our bibles the Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds in exactly the same way that Jesus opened the hearts and minds of the two disciples over 2,000 years ago. His teachings are the same - Love God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. Love your neighbour and pray for your enemies. Forgive all. Welcome the stranger. Care for the sick. Visit the imprisoned. Provide for the least amongst us. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

Nothing has changed except that now it is us walking on the road.

Their encounter literally so turned their hearts that they physically turned around and “returned at once to Jerusalem”.

We must allow ourselves to be so overwhelmed by the revelation of God’s love for us all that no fear, no evil, no suffering and no hatred leaves us in despair.

The choice is always ours. We can continue on our roads to Emmaus, downcast and stay there, continuing to live in despair, confusion, puzzlement, lost, discouraged and fearful, and distance ourselves from God and turn our back on his plans for us and leave behind our faith. Or we can hear the Word, hear His voice, and be overwhelmed by His love. We can turn back to our Jerusalem, back to whatever it was we were running from.

And to end I have stolen the prayer of blessing Jon used to close our Maundy Thursday supper which is adapted from Ephesians 4, verses 4-6.

We were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. We have one Master...one God, and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. So let everything we are and think and do be permeated with the Oneness.
Amen.

Carol Elsasser, 23 April 2023