

Worship 11th April
Aberlour Parish Church
Rev Andrew Kimmitt

Call to Worship

Let's worship now the God of love, who walks every step of the way with us, before us, above and below us; the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life...

Hymn CH4 609

- 1 Come, living God, when least expected,
when minds are dull and hearts are cold,
through sharpening word and warm affection
revealing truths as yet untold.
- 2 Break from the tomb in which we hide you
to speak again in startling ways ;
break through the words in which we bind you
to resurrect our lifeless praise.
- 4 So, let our minds be sharp to read you
in sight or sound or printed page,
and let us greet you in our neighbours,
in ardent youth or mellow age.
- 5 Then, through our gloom, your Son will meet us
as vivid truth and living Lord,
exploding doubt and disillusion
to scatter hope and joy abroad.
- 6 Then we will share his radiant brightness
and, blazing through the dread of night,
illuminate by love and reason,
for those in darkness, faith's delight.

Alan Gaunt (*b.* 1935)

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Prayer of approach, confession and Lord's Prayer

Father God,
each of us has our own story to tell,
our own journey through life.
We come to you now in prayer,
knowing that you know us,
that you have been with us on that journey.
This is an awesome truth
and brings great comfort at the same time.

Jesus,
your story is our story.
Your journey through life, death and resurrection
is our journey.
Knowing that we share this
and have the promise of everlasting life

is mind boggling
and reassuring at the same time.

Holy Spirit,
companion on the way,
as we journey on through life
we have you with us and in us.
Knowing that we are never out of your grasp
that you never leave us
is terrifying
and inspiring at the same time.

God in Trinity
we know that we never get it all right.
We wander off from time to time
forgetting that you are keeping watch.
For those times when we have ignored your presence,
tried to run away even,
forgive us.
For those times when we have
forgotten your eternal promise,
forgive us.
For those times when we have not listened
to that small voice within,
forgive us.
We come today
seeking your reassurance
and companionship once more,
as we pray together the way you taught us saying

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 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.

Reading – Luke 24:13-35

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. 18 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?” 19 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, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 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. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 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. 24 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.” 25 Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

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

Reflection

Sometimes it's only in the looking back that we see clearly. Hindsight, they, is 20/20.

That seems to be the experience of these disciples Cleopas and his companion. That they trudge the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, hearts and faces downcast – only to be accompanied by this stranger who appears to have been hiding under a rock for the last 3 days because he doesn't seem to know what has happened in Jerusalem to Jesus of Nazareth.

Ironically, as it pans out, this stranger pretty much had been hiding under a rock – or at least, lying dead behind a stone sealing his tomb. But it's not until after spending the majority of a 7mile walk with them, their insistence that he stay and eat with them, and then his breaking of bread that they recognise they Jesus they knew and loved.

And as at the moment of recognition, Jesus vanishes again.

There are lots of striking wee details in this passage.

In the bible study earlier this week we noted how easy it is to slip past that this episode takes place *on the same day* as the women going to find the grave empty. And those women didn't actually see Jesus – not in Luke's version. So this Road to Emmaus incident is the first and most extensive post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to anyone in Luke's account.

And questions too.

How exactly was it that Jesus went through all the Hebrew bible, 'Moses and all the prophets,' to interpret what had happened. There'd be plenty of theologians since who would dearly love to know that!

And perhaps most puzzling: why is it that Cleopas and friend don't recognise Jesus? They are not named as members of the 12 disciples, but it seems very clear that they are among Jesus' closest and most devoted wider group of followers. They would know Jesus when they saw him, or heard him – surely? And on a

deeper level than the logistics of it seeming implausible they wouldn't recognise him, what is the significance of that lack of recognition? And of that moment of recognising?

I wonder if its partly to do with 'having eyes to see.'

On the literal level, psychologists have found that in despair our perception of sight changes: people diagnosed with depression see less contrast and less colour – more grey. And that's not just perception, it's true in a physiological phenomenon too: Harvard neuroscientists compared visual perception between a group of people who lived with depression against those without a diagnosis by attaching sensors to their temples. These sensors detected the strength of electric signals being sent by the eye through the optic nerve – the signals were weaker (meaning less perception from the eye) in those who were living with depression. In a literal sense, our emotional disposition affects what we can and can't perceive.

Now I'm fairly sure that Luke's telling of the story wasn't meant to make the same point as those Harvard scientists – but it is true that sometimes we have eyes to see what others don't, and vice versa. It doesn't seem a stretch to suggest that Luke's point is that Cleopas simply wasn't equipped – at a spiritual level- with the 'eyes to see' the reality of the risen Jesus.

Which, I think is a version of the question that I think this passage asks of us. What do we have eyes to see? Are there truths right in front of us that we don't grasp because we're looking at them with the wrong perspective? Insights so in front of our nose that we miss them because of going about it the wrong way – like trying to watch the TV through binoculars?

Likewise, are there doubts or falsehoods we could let go of if we saw things from a different angle?

Jesus resurrection gives us the lens we need in order to see things clearly.

It gives us the ability to find hope over despair. Just like Cleopas, and the disciples, and the women who beat the men to it, and all the others we'll meet in the coming weeks as news of the resurrection reverberates outwards: people for whom the truth and significant of the risen Jesus changes perspective and insight. We'll meet Stephen who see Jesus in heaven at the right hand of God; we'll look on as Saul is converted on the Damascus Road through the literal experience of blindness and receiving sight. In each case we'll see how those with reason to despair find hope.

But perhaps most importantly of all we'll see that in each case: God is with people in that transition from despair to hope.

Our reading today is the beginning of a pattern in the New Testament; a pattern of God being *with* those who are struggling to find the lens of hope.

On the Emmaus Road, with Cleopas; and with us along the way of our lives, the risen Christ walks alongside us, with us – in spirit, if not physical presence, - as our companion along the way.

Hymn CH4 539

- 1 I want Jesus to walk with me ;
I want Jesus to walk with me ;
all along my pilgrim journey,
oh, I want Jesus to walk with me.
- 2 In my trials, Lord, walk with me ;
in my trials, Lord, walk with me ;
when my heart is almost breaking,
oh, I want Jesus to walk with me.
- 3 When I'm troubled, Lord, walk with me ;
when I'm troubled, Lord, walk with me ;
when my head is bowed in sorrow,
oh, I want Jesus to walk with me.

Prayers for the world

Lord God,
in life we journey with you,
we journey with our families and friends
and with those we meet day by day.
May we be to you and to them good companions.

Help us to put our best foot forward
firmly on the path you would have us walk.
Help us not to put our feet in our mouths,
on to step on anyone along the way.
We may not always understand it,
but we have other companions to walk with.
People we may never meet
but that we share this world of yours with.
Help us to remember them as we
travel along.

Help us to be mindful
of the impact we can have on the lives
of people elsewhere.
In our purchasing,
in our using natural resources,
in our stewardship of your creation,
make our choices good ones.

Choices that do no harm,
offer opportunity
and love to our world companions.

Lord God,
guide those in leadership positions
to walk the walk as well as talk the talk.
Help them to make wise choices,
choices that do no harm,
offer opportunity
and love to our world companions.
As we walk this journey called life
we do not walk alone.

And this week especially we pray for those who mourn life ended.
All whose hearts are sore today as they mourn the loss of someone they have loved.

We think of those who have lost those whom their love has created, while still in the womb...
We think of parents having to bury a child –
And of young adults taken too soon;
As well as of adults of all ages
whose voices we were not ready to let fall silent.

And on this day, we remember in particular,
those who have spent many years together:
Those whose lives have been interwoven and intertwined for decades and who know only the constant companionship of the other
And who live now with deafening silence
And a heart-breaking sadness.
Into the pain of the great gap loss leaves...
Into the confusion of thoughts and emotions
We ask for peace to descend
And for comfort through the touch and kindness
of family and friends -
As well as for the hope that comes from faith in an Easter God
For whom death does not have the final word.
Hold tight, Father God,
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and all her family, we pray.
But may all who mourn know you close.
This day and always.
Amen

Hymn CH4 124

- 1 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation ;
praise God, my soul, for in him are your health and salvation ;
come all who hear,
into his presence draw near,
joining in glad adoration.
- 2 Praise to the Lord, who in all things is wondrously reigning,
shields you from harm and is gently yet firmly sustaining.
Have you not seen
how your heart's wishes have been
granted by God's wise ordaining ?
- 3 Praise to the Lord, who with blessing and power will defend you ;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend you ;
ponder anew
what the Almighty can do :
God will for ever befriend you.
- 4 Praise to the Lord ! O let all that is in me adore him !
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him !
Let the Amen
sound from God's people again :
gladly for ever adore him.

Joachim Neander (1650–1680)

translated Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878)(*alt.*)

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Sending and blessing

Go now, to love and serve the Lord,
And may you find – sometimes as surprise, sometimes as reassurance-
the presence of Christ with you in all the steps you take in this life.

The blessing of God be yours this day,
and in every moment to come.
Amen.