

Resurrection Transformation Sunday 19th April 2020

Good morning, and welcome to St John's at home online. Today we continue to bring God's word to you, and whilst we acknowledge it is not the same as meeting in church, we hope you will take some encouragement through what is shared in the recording. This morning we will begin with intercessions read by Sally. I will then read from Luke chapter 24 verses 13-35 and will follow with a short talk on its meaning, and at the end, I will close in prayer.

[Intercessions] – read by Sally, written by **Betty**

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Let us pray.

Our loving heavenly Father, we come to you in this time of uncertainty and difficulty thankful for your promise that you will never leave us or forsake us.

At this time when covid 19 is spreading around the world we thank you for our NHS and for all those people on the front line striving to save lives. We pray for those in countries where health care and financial support are not available. Many of these places are also coping with violence, famine, drought and other pestilences. Lord have mercy upon them. We ask you to protect the health and safety of aid workers and Missionaries, thinking especially of Jenny and the Day family.

We have many brothers and sisters around the world who are being persecuted because of their faith in you, who may be in more danger as tempers flare and scapegoats are sought. Have your hand of protection upon them, and fill them with your holy spirit so they may stand firm in their faith. Fill government leaders everywhere with compassion and wisdom so that they will make good decisions for their people.

We pray for our own government and thank you for the recovery of our prime minister. I pray that you will heal him completely so that he may take up the reins of government again. Please bring unity to all the parties so that they can work together to bring an end to this pandemic. Give the nation patience to bear the lock down as long as necessary. In addition to those working on the front line in our NHS we ask for your blessing on others keeping the essential services on track. Care home staff, food producers and distributors, retail staff, bin men, postal workers, those who are working in businesses making essential items for the NHS and utility workers. I'm sure I've forgotten a lot of people, but You Lord know who they are, please keep them safe.

We pray for those in our community who are separated from loved ones at this time, especially those living alone. Thank you that there are so many people wishing to help the vulnerable. Thank you for our communication systems which are linking families and allowing churches to hold services online. We especially thank you that the family at St John's were able to virtually "meet" last Sunday and pray it will not be too long before we can meet in person. Thank you for all the work that Steve and Ian are doing, for Sue keeping us informed and for Laura and Russ completing the Alpha course.

We especially lift to you those who are suffering in mind, body or spirit, thinking especially of Val and Anthony in hospital, and Emma and Yvette grieving the loss of loved ones. In the midst of so much suffering, we thank you for the safe delivery of baby Cordelia and rejoice with Tania, Ross, Eliza and Blake.

Lord please have your hand of protection on your people at St John's, and the members of all the Christian communities in Penge, Anerley and Beckenham.

Finally Lord, it seems that you have given us a great opportunity at this time of grief for the gospel to be heard where previously it has not. I have heard of non-Christians listening to broadcasts with their Christian spouses, let the words they hear fall on fertile ground and let this be a time when our nation comes to realise and repent of its sin and turn back to you our Saviour and Redeemer.

Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The **reading** is taken from **Luke 24:13-35** - New International Version (NIV)

On the Road to Emmaus

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still; their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹ "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of

angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

²⁵ He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

Talk

At the level of drama this passage has everything. Tom Wright, Christian author, writes that it has sorrow, suspense, puzzlement, gradual dawning of light; and then in the second half, unexpected actions, astonished recognition, a flurry of excitement and activity. It is both a captivating account, and also a model for a great deal of what being a Christian, from that day to this, is all about.

The passage starts with such sadness and disappointment as seen through the eyes of a follower of Christ called Cleopas, as he painfully recalls to Jesus (whilst not recognising him) the events of the last few days. He was surprised Jesus was asking what had happened, as it had been no small event, and the news about Jesus’ crucifixion had spread throughout Jerusalem. Because this was Passover week Jews visiting the city from all over the Roman Empire now knew about his death. This was not a small, insignificant event, affecting only the disciples – the whole nation was interested. The sorrow of these two followers was because they had been counting on Jesus to redeem Israel, in vs ²¹ *but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel’*, that is, to rescue the nation from its enemies. Most Jews believed that the Old Testament prophecies pointed to a military and political Messiah. The hope, therefore, for them departed with Jesus’ death, When Jesus died, they lost all hope; that hope they saw nailed to the cross in the capital. They didn’t understand that Jesus’ death offered the greatest hope possible. They had not realised that the Messiah had come to redeem people from slavery to sin.

Cleopas continues to recall what they had also heard, that three days later, some of the women among the disciples amazed the group. They went to the tomb to not only find

it empty; they also reported angels telling them that Jesus was alive. In vs 24 it says ²⁴ Then some of our companions [an allusion to Peter and others] went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.” The two followers are baffled by what has taken place. The last thing they expect is a resurrection. They at first missed the significance of history’s greatest event because they were too focused on their disappointments and problems. In fact, they didn’t recognise Jesus when he was walking beside them. To compound the problem, they were walking in the wrong direction - away from the fellowship of believers in Jerusalem. Do we sometimes miss what Jesus is showing us? We may miss Jesus and withdraw from the strength found in other believers when we become focused on our dashed hopes and frustrated plans. It may not be easy in our current circumstances to be connected to one another for encouragement, but one way is through joining Homegroups that continue to meet virtually online. When we are looking for Jesus in our midst then will we experience the power and help he can bring.

In response to the two followers’ puzzlement, Jesus said to them, in vs ²⁵ “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. This must have been the most amazing Bible study as Jesus went through the Bible explaining that it was all about him, applying it to his ministry. Jesus reintroduced these disciples to the Old Testament. Christ is the thread woven through all the Scriptures, the central theme that binds them together. The followers had been seeing the Bible as to how God would redeem Israel from suffering, but it was instead through suffering, through in particular, the suffering which would be taken on himself by Israel’s representative, the Messiah. The Books point to a fulfilment which could only be found when God’s anointed took Israel’s suffering, and hence the world’s suffering, on to himself, died under its weight, and rose again as the beginning of God’s new creation, God’s new people. Scripture outlines, that for the Messiah there is suffering and then glory. These things ‘have to’ be since they are part of God’s effort to restore relationship with humanity. For Luke’s readers this is a call to believe and not to be ‘slow of heart to believe’ and slip into the fog these two followers were in.

As the followers arrive in Emmaus, they invite Jesus to stay, and in v30 it says, ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. It is no accident that Jesus is revealed as he sits having table fellowship with the two disciples. The table was the place for fellowship in the ancient world. Here family and friends gathered to share time with each other. Luke has underscored the importance of meal scenes throughout his Gospel. The table was a place where Jesus was heard and where his presence came across most intimately. This fact suggests that Jesus reveals himself in the midst of the basic moments of life. He is at home in the midst of our everyday activity, not least in our current living circumstances.

In the passage Jesus himself was present, Jesus himself was seen and he reveals himself in two ways. First, he reveals himself through the Scriptures. In vs ³² They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” Cleopas and his friend acknowledge how amazing their walk and talks have been. Had not God been at work through Jesus’ words to help them see what God was all about in the suffering and the glory of Jesus? Was it not the promise of God that they had just experienced? There may have been a time when you have had a sense of your heart ‘burning within’ as you have been listening to the Bible being explained, or as you have been reading it yourself. Perhaps the words suddenly seemed so relevant to you that it felt as if God was speaking directly to you? We get a taste of this every time we hear the Bible explained in such a way as to *reveal* Jesus.

The second way Jesus reveals himself is through the bread. Luke’s description of this encounter echoes the account of Jesus’ last supper with his disciples. We can take encouragement that we too can encounter Jesus in the ‘breaking of bread’ when we celebrate Communion together. The Scriptures and the sacraments are two of the ways in which we can encounter Jesus. Last Sunday we were able to share in Communion together via video link, and we plan to do this again. The followers’ reaction to seeing Jesus at the table communicates no real surprise in light of what has taken place on the road. Now it all makes sense. They do now understand what has happened and the narrative for them changes from: ‘They crucified him – but we had hoped he would redeem Israel’ to ‘They crucified him – and that was how he *did* redeem Israel.’ It was the resurrection that made the difference. Back in Jerusalem they meet the 11 disciples to share their story, and they learn Jesus has also appeared to Simon (Peter). Despair becomes delight as the truth about Jesus’ resurrection begins to sink in. In these verses we see the appearance of a physically raised Jesus – now we no longer merely have a claim to resurrection, but a manifestation of the result. Such experiences pushed the disciples from the category of sceptic to persuaded.

This passage is one of many resurrection accounts in the bible, witnessed by different believers (referenced in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8), and reassures us that Jesus has arisen and is alive. The resurrection serves as the basis for our being able to receive the many blessings of grace that God gives his children (cf Peter 1:3-6), notably forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. The resurrection hope is important, since we often feel that our sin or the evil one is more powerful than we are. Yet in the context of Jesus’ power obtained through his resurrection, we have access to the one who enables us to overcome whatever obstacles the evil one places in our path. We may be feeling many different things at this time; we are simply called as disciples to follow the leading of the Lord and to draw on the spiritual resources he makes available to us. He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world.

The story as a whole is often used as a focus for meditation, not least when people find themselves in difficulties. In these current difficult times, you may like to bring your problems on the road to Emmaus with Cleopas and his companion; be prepared to

share them in prayer with a stranger who approaches; and learn to listen for His voice, explaining, leading forwards, warming your heart by applying Scripture to what's going on. This passage forms one of the most powerful encouragements to pray for His presence, and sense of guidance, whenever we study the bible.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord Jesus, through the passage we understand that the traumatic events surrounding Jesus are part of God's plan of deliverance. What the followers saw was not the end of hope, but its beginning. We thank you Jesus that you are alive right now, that you are with us, and you care deeply for us. As we study the Scriptures, may our hearts burn within us as we encounter you through them, and may the God of all hope fill us with all joy, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen