

EASTER DAY

20 April 2025

Fr David's Sermon

As many of you know, this is my last Easter before retirement. I hope you will bear with me then, if I move on a few hours from the Gospel we just heard. Each of the resurrection appearances gives us different insights into that most wonderful mystery. If one is allowed to have favourites, mine is that on the Road to Emmaus. *Luke 24. 13-35*

It happened 'That same day,' (as Luke tells us.) Two of Jesus' followers were on their way to Emmaus - walking and talking and arguing about what had happened to him. The risen Christ joins them: walking together with strangers was common, for company and safety. They fail to recognize him. The word can also mean to perceive him. Hardly surprising as they think he is dead! And failure, at first, to recognize Jesus is a theme common to several resurrection appearances. Jesus asks them what they are talking about and, with comic irony, they ask if he is the only person in Jerusalem who had not heard about the recent events. Jesus explains to them how the Old Testament Scriptures show that the Jewish Messiah was bound to suffer. When they reach the village Jesus seems ready to go on, but they invite him to stay and eat with them. While they are at table, Jesus 'took bread and said the blessing; he broke the bread, and offered it to them', (verse 30) just as he had at the Last Supper, the previous Thursday. Then their eyes are opened and they recognize him, yet at that same moment he vanishes. They realise their hearts were on fire as he spoke to them on the road and explained the Scriptures; and they rush back to Jerusalem to share the joyful news.

This story speaks to me in so many ways. I like walking and it can be a good time to speak with someone in greater depth. I don't like arguments. But perhaps, at their best, they can be honest discussions leading to deeper insights. The Risen Christ always walks alongside us on our journey through life. Yet we often fail to recognize, to perceive him. 'Humanly speaking they – and we – fail to recognize Jesus because, like many a modern skeptic, they – and we – are convinced that such a miracle could not happen, and no amount of evidence can persuade them – or us – otherwise.' 1 .

If we will, we can ask the Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts so that we meet Christ in Scripture. We can be his companions on the way: companions literally means those who share bread.

Jesus comes to supper as their guest, and yet, by repeating the actions of the Last Supper, he becomes their host. Now they recognize him in the breaking of bread. For this is the surest way he gives us to recognize him: the Eucharist, the Mass, Holy Communion, which has been the heart and center of Christian worship, each Sunday, each day, from that day to this. This is how our hearts can be set on fire – how we can be filled with joy and inspired to share the Good News.

I love Caravaggio's painting of this scene. A copy hangs on our dining room wall, to remind us that not just the Eucharist, but any and every meal, where companions share bread, can become an encounter with the Risen Lord. Caravaggio was a dubious character, like the ones Jesus loved in his lifetime. 'His life was just as provocative as his paintings.' 2 In this work, Caravaggio makes the scene vivid by his characteristic combination of realism and light. An almost unearthly light shines on Christ's face as he raises his hand in blessing. One of the two companions stares at him intently, the other flings wide his arms in astonishment. The

innkeeper looks, to me, indifferent to what is happening, as so many still are. Caravaggio's dramatic depiction makes the scene so vivid. He brings it into our own time. He involves us, so that we don't just passively watch, but feel involved in the drama. 3

This Easter Day, may we recognize Christ anew, in friend and stranger, in the Scriptures and in the Breaking of Bread. May our lives be drawn into his risen life. Thus may we be filled with joy to share. For:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.

- 1) G B Caird, 'The Gospel of St Luke', Adam and Charles Black, 1963
- 2) Alastair Sooke, introducing on-line the National Gallery Exhibition 'Beyond Caravaggio.' 2016
- 3) Adapted from Letizia Treves, Curator of that exhibition.