

Sermon - 26th April, 2020 (Ed Manning)

Years ago I was in a children's musical at church and one of the adults jumped too hard, there was a loud crack and the staging broke. Faith does not mean we always believe and never question, but that we can jump up and down believing that the floor on which we stand will not break, that God is bigger than our doubts and fears.

It is difficult not to come to Easter this year with fresh eyes. We proclaim, "Alleluia Christ is Risen, He is Risen indeed Alleluia" and while I do not dispute that, the reality of the first Easter was doubt and confusion. The women arrive before dawn, find the tomb empty, and are confused and afraid.

Two people walking to Emmaus, so sad because they think that Jesus is dead, buried and mission over and are confused by what they have heard.

One phrase stood out for me as I prepared, Cleopas tells Jesus, "But we had hoped." Have you ever been in that position where you had hoped, you had believed, you had faith, but now, at least for a time, all that is in the past? The world looks dark, unfriendly and filled with sadness. A relationship broken. an ambition unrealised, a job a nightmare, a loved one died, a health problem for you or a loved one. Jesus had come and yet the Roman rule remained and would continue to kill and oppress. Jesus has come and yet Covid 19 may seem to rule and certainly kills.

Jesus comes and walks with them.

If I was Jesus I wouldn't have been able to stop myself telling them the answer. But Jesus listens to them, he helps them to talk, to tell their story. When someone has lost hope the first thing to do is listen. The most precious conversations of sharing my faith with others who are seeking have started with listening. If someone had hoped but now feels broken we need to let them speak.

I acknowledge this can be a challenge, it is sometimes easier to speak than to listen.

God listens and you can give him your grief, your pain, your anger, your frustration, because God cares.

Perhaps we would be more comfortable if Jesus then just empathised with them, pointed out that the Kingdom of God is within us and for us to get on transforming the world, but Jesus does not do that.

Jesus does not just listen and love and accept people, he also speaks the truth. The narrow way Jesus calls us to is the intersection of love and truth, that is the path Christ trod and we are called to tread.

Jesus listens and they open their hearts to him, and then Jesus speaks truth. He opens the scriptures to them and explains why He had to suffer. Jesus is divine and we are not, and when we come to speak truth to others it is useful to remember that. However, being able to share God's good news under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is something that we are all called to do. We can only do this if we know God's word of truth, and know it well enough to understand what it means. We need the Holy Spirit and we need to study with our minds. The enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and the study of the scripture and the Christian life work together.

Luke records God had a plan. God is at work. Easter reminds us of the darkness and the light. The light which shines in the darkness and cannot be extinguished. We see the darkness at work in the world bringing death, brokenness and pain, but the light shines in the darkness even when we cannot see that God is with us – even when He is walking right besides us.

When first hit by the story of Coronavirus, it felt like science in the form of a vaccine would be the saviour not faith. However, science is to the glory of God and the science of medicine is something that the church has long been involved in.

But part of the question is what had these two hoped for? As they walked along the road to Emmaus, perhaps what they had hoped for had gone. Easter came but Rome remained, and would continue to kill and oppress for many more years. That first Easter the disciples are in lockdown for fear not of Covid 19 but of human authorities. Jesus has come, but Rome remained just as disease and death does today. It is right that we feel the pain of this broken world, as we put our trust in God for his life in us now, and in the world to come.

So the two travellers arrive at their destination and invite Jesus to join them, and after politely pretending to be going further he agrees and joins them for a meal. They have travelled with him but they were kept from recognising him.

However, as Jesus breaks bread they recognise that the person they have been speaking to was Jesus. They started with disappointment, they heard the message but then they met with Jesus and having walked all those miles they now turn on their heels and return to Jerusalem. Christ has risen, alleluia.

If you are disillusioned and down, if hope appears to be something you had in the past, let us listen to one another and let us share our pains with God. Let us listen to God's truth, that God loves you, that He died for you, that He cares for you. Let us not give up meeting together, even if it is only online, and particularly breaking bread together. Let us pray that even in what may seem like a broken Eucharist we may meet the broken saviour our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ed Manning