

ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH
Sunday 23rd April 2023; Easter 3a
Transcript

Ed 22.04.23

Welcome and Intimations

Good morning. Wherever you come from today, whether you come regularly, or occasionally, perhaps even for the first time, you are welcome to our worship. Your presence enriches us in this time of celebration together.

Introduction:

Today we continue to celebrate Easter as we read in St Luke's Gospel about a journey to Emmaus, and how the risen Christ is not recognised until he is revealed as he breaks bread. If you are especially enthralled by my Message this morning, you can find it on Orkney Reflections!

Let us take a moment to be quiet and know the presence of God among us.

Pause

Gathering Prayer

As Cleopas and his companion walked along the road,
they talked about all that had happened, and Jesus came to them.

Loving Lord,

as we come to worship, help us to see and hear, not only the familiar,
but the unexpected, the new, the different.

Help us to understand and have a new awareness of you and of your story,
of your love and your presence in our lives. Amen.

Call to Worship:

Come to worship the risen Christ with open eyes and ears, minds and hearts.
Come, prepared, expecting, desiring –
to discover and know more of Christ.

Let us worship God:

Hymn 409 Jesus is risen, alleluia!

Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray:

We gather together today with the events of Easter still fresh in our minds,
still with questions, gaps in our understanding.

We seek to learn how best to live the life we are called to live.

Jesus was with the two on the road to Emmaus;

working in their lives, even though they didn't know it.

Jesus is with us on our road; working in our lives, even when we don't feel it.

May our eyes and our minds be opened to him,

opened to see and recognise the strangers in our midst, to listen to their stories,

remembering that, in these ways, we may meet, unawares, Jesus, our friend, our Lord and master.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for including me in your taskforce
and for the enabling gifts of your Holy Spirit.

I pray for the will and the skill to better do those errands
which I have done moderately well in days past,

and to undertake new assignments, not as a leaden duty,
but as a joy that is set before me.

If I grow careless, encourage me in diligence,
should I grow tough, restore me in tenderness.
Let me always be open to the new things
you may wish to achieve in and through me;
through Messiah Jesus, who makes all things new. Amen.¹(Rev.Bruce Prewer, Australia)
In Jesus's name we pray, in the words he has taught us,
using whatever form, or language, seems best to us:
*.....Our Father which 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 our 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 for ever Amen.*

Readings: Anne will read for us:

First Reading:

Acts 2:14a and 36-41 (Contemporary English Version)

Peter Speaks to the Crowd

Peter stood with the eleven apostles and spoke in a loud and clear voice to the crowd:
Everyone in Israel should then know for certain that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ,
even though you put him to death on a cross.
When the people heard this, they were very upset. They asked Peter and the other apostles,
"Friends, what shall we do?"
Peter said, "Turn back to God! Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be
forgiven. Then you will be given the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you and your children. It is
for everyone our Lord God will choose, no matter where they live."
Peter told them many other things as well. Then he said, "I beg you to save yourselves from
what will happen to all these evil people." On that day about three thousand believed his
message and were baptized. They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were
like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together.

Second Reading:

Gospel Reading: Luke 24: 13-35 (Contemporary English Version)

Jesus Appears to Two Disciples

That same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to the village of Emmaus, which was about
seven miles from Jerusalem. As they were talking and thinking about what had happened, Jesus
came near and started walking along beside them. But they did not know who he was.

Jesus asked them, "What were you talking about as you walked along?"

The two of them stood there looking sad and gloomy. Then the one named Cleopas asked Jesus,
"Are you the only person from Jerusalem who didn't know what was happening there these last
few days?"

"What do you mean?" Jesus asked.

They answered:

Those things that happened to Jesus from Nazareth. By what he did and said he showed that he
was a powerful prophet, who pleased God and all the people. Then the chief priests and our
leaders had him arrested and sentenced to die on a cross. We had hoped that he would be the
one to set Israel free! But it has already been three days since all this happened.

Some women in our group surprised us. They had gone to the tomb early in the morning, but
did not find the body of Jesus. They came back, saying that they had seen a vision of angels who

¹ from Bruce Prewer; adapted with permission of the author.

told them that he is alive. Some men from our group went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said. But they didn't see Jesus either.

Then Jesus asked the two disciples, "Why can't you understand? How can you be so slow to believe all that the prophets said? Didn't you know that the Messiah would have to suffer before he was given his glory?" Jesus then explained everything written about himself in the Scriptures, beginning with the Law of Moses and the Books of the Prophets.

When the two of them came near the village where they were going, Jesus seemed to be going farther. They begged him, "Stay with us! It's already late, and the sun is going down." So Jesus went into the house to stay with them.

After Jesus sat down to eat, he took some bread. He blessed it and broke it. Then he gave it to them. At once they knew who he was, but he disappeared. They said to each other, "When he talked with us along the road and explained the Scriptures to us, didn't it warm our hearts?" So they got right up and returned to Jerusalem.

The two disciples found the eleven apostles and the others gathered together. And they learned from the group that the Lord was really alive and had appeared to Peter. Then the disciples from Emmaus told what happened on the road and how they knew he was the Lord when he broke the bread.

*For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us, thanks be to God. Amen*

2nd. Hymn 416 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing (Tune Truro 214)

Message:

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; Amen.

The more I read the story of the walk to Emmaus the more I like it. It's one of the best known and best loved stories of the New Testament. In just over twenty verses it summarises the whole Christian life

It is still the first day of the week, on the day that would change the world, the day we know as Easter Sunday. The disciples, hiding in Jerusalem, frightened, disheartened and depressed by the arrest and murder of their beloved teacher, have been startled by some women claiming that the crucified Jesus has risen from the tomb, and that they have seen him. Are these distraught women to be believed? John and Peter run to the tomb. It really is empty.

Two of the people who know all about what happened set out to walk to Emmaus, about seven miles west of Jerusalem. The exact location is not known, but that doesn't matter - indeed that's the point. They were on the "road" – pilgrims on the road of life. Jesus is the *Way*, the Road. One of the two is called Cleopas, and it seems likely that the other is his wife. Confused and depressed, they are talking about what has happened, recounting these rumours that Jesus has risen from the dead. As they're walking and talking, they are joined by another man. We know that this is the risen Jesus, but they don't recognise him. Why? What prevented them from recognising him? Maybe, walking west, with the setting sun in their eyes? Because they knew he was dead? Or their memory of what Jesus should look like? As he walks with them, the man asks them, "What were you discussing so seriously as you walked?"

They're astonished. How can he not know what has happened in the last three days? We would call it headline news. They had lost the leader they loved, the one who had given them such high hopes, who had made life worth living. A prophet, a man who did nothing but good; one they

hoped might be the promised Messiah, has been killed, and this man doesn't know! You can imagine Cleopas's astonishment:

"Whaar has thu been beuy? Does thu no ken whit's been gaan on?"

The stranger listens, but says nothing. He wants to hear their version of what happened. They saw Jesus's death as the failure of his mission. The woman says, "Something else has happened earlier this morning. Friends of ours went to his tomb and found it empty. They said they saw angels who told them that Jesus is alive!"

We can hear the stranger sigh, and his words:

"Why can't you understand? How can you be so slow to believe all that the prophets said?"

They listen as he gives them a Scripture lesson. He explains that everything that happened to Jesus, including his sufferings and death, far from being a tragedy, was part of God's plan.

Luke is the only writer to speak clearly about a *suffering Messiah*. The Jews expected that God would redeem Israel *from* suffering, but here is the story of how God would redeem Israel *through* the suffering of their Messiah. Later, the Church would come to identify the suffering Messiah with the Suffering Servant mentioned in Isaiah, the fulfilment of Old Testament promises and of Jewish hopes. As they begin to understand that he is talking about their beloved friend and teacher, everything falls into place: Jesus's words about himself as he taught and healed so many illnesses; Jesus's continued references to his Father; Jesus's suffering and crucifixion. They realise that all of this, even Jesus' death, has been God's plan from the beginning.

As they reach their destination, the stranger makes as if to continue his journey. They don't want him to go: the tradition of hospitality is strong.

"Stay with us! It's already late, and the sun is going down."

In the manner of Middle Eastern people through the ages, they invite him to eat with them. He agrees. On the table there is a loaf of bread, and water, and wine. He takes the bread, blesses it, offers it to them. In this action their eyes are opened, and they recognize him. We are reminded that, in the Eucharist, we too recognise the presence of Jesus among us, not only in the symbolism of bread and wine, but in the breaking and sharing, and in the people who share. Then Jesus disappears. Still basking in the afterglow, they say to each other, 'Didn't it warm our hearts when he talked with us along the road and explained the Scriptures to us?'

How come they didn't recognize him as he walked with them those long miles? They don't understand: but no matter. They have seen the Lord. They must share this news with the others. Immediately they set out on the road back to Jerusalem as fast as their tired legs will carry them, back to the same house where they find the eleven and their companions gathered together, but now rejoicing and saying, that *'the Lord was really alive and had appeared to Peter'*. Then the disciples from Emmaus told what happened on the road and how they knew he was the Lord when he broke the bread.'

A remarkable story, with a lot of lessons: transition from blindness to sight; from doubt to faith; from fear to confidence and boldness. What preoccupations and prejudices of ours would we like Jesus to take from us, so that we can recognise him afresh?

All the ingredients of the Christian life are here:

– Running away from where Christ is to be found. How often do we do it?

- Meeting Jesus in the unexpected place, or unexpected person, or situation. How many times does this happen and we don't recognise him - or worse - mistreat him?
 - Finding the real meaning and identity of Jesus and his mission in having the Scriptures fully explained. Without the Scriptures we cannot claim to know Jesus. Yet how many Christians go through life hardly ever opening a Bible?
 - Recognising Jesus in the breaking of bread and in the sharing of the bread and wine in our celebration of the Eucharist. Here we have a model of the Lord's Supper. First the Word, the explanation of Scripture; then the Eucharist itself, where we remember in thanksgiving what Jesus did for us through his suffering, his death and resurrection. The bread and wine that symbolise his body and blood are shared among his people, the members of the Body of Christ, to strengthen their union and their commitment to continuing his work.
 - The emphasis on the sharing: sharing the message with others, that they in turn may also share it with someone else: passing it on.
 - The importance of hospitality and kindness to the stranger. *"I was hungry... and you gave me - did not give me - food"*
 - *"...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."*
- Jesus is especially present, and to be found and loved, in the very least of our brothers and sisters.

A final thought on this wonderful story:

If you're content that it all happened like that, that it could have been video-recorded, if they'd had such a thing, that's absolutely fine. If you're puzzled as to why these two people didn't recognise Jesus as they walked and as he explained all the scriptures concerning himself, that's fine too. Could there be more to the story of the Emmaus Road than at first appears? Might the story be intended as a parable - *'an earthly story with a heavenly meaning'*. A story that seems to be about one thing, but is really about something else?

If we look at this story as a parable, we can see years of early Christian experience condensed into one afternoon. The risen Jesus explains the scriptures - his life and death make sense of the written word. He is known in the sharing of bread. In our uncertain times, as we emerge from the Pandemic, as we face big changes in the Church, we have something in common with these two dejected disciples struggling to see through the fog of disappointment and despair to realise that God is still there, still walking with them. Just as the risen Jesus walked with them, he journeys also with us, whether we know it or not, whether we recognise him or not.

Jesus continues to be experienced as a figure of the present, and not just of the past.

In emphasising kindness to strangers, is Luke reminding us that Jesus is to be found and experienced in everyday circumstances rather than in some esoteric religious experience? Do others glimpse the Spirit *through us*? Do they find *in us* the warmth and welcome of the Love of God?

Jesus' own example and teaching remind us that other people meet Jesus when they see his followers putting their faith into action in practical situations. Even at the Kirk, a formal service doesn't always give a chance for real sharing and meeting with one another. A quick hand-shake at the door and a remark about the weather don't always help mutual communication. The shared meal - table fellowship - was a central part of Jesus' practical ministry. We need to find opportunities for genuine Christian caring and sharing. Maybe a visit or a phone call to somebody who's not getting out, and feels the walls closing in.

We don't know exactly where Emmaus was: so, for us, it could be *anywhere*. The Emmaus story is a reminder that we can feel the risen Christ among us without having him here in the flesh. One writer says:

*"Whether the story happened or not, "Emmaus always happens: "Emmaus happens again and again."*²

Emmaus happens whenever we recognize the risen Christ among us.

This is the Jesus we walk with in our time and place, our journey. This is the Jesus who walks with us. Have you felt the presence of Christ in your own Emmaus Road experience? Perhaps in reading or reflecting on scripture, or in prayer? In caring and sharing with others? Can you witness to what has happened to you, just as Cleopas and his companion told what had happened to them on the road?

Questions for us all.

Amen.

May God bless to us this word preached in his name, and to his name be the glory and the praise.

During the next hymn please bring the Offering to the Chancel

Hymn: 549 How deep the Father's love for us

Dedication of Offering :

Gifts for You, our Father,

given while recognising the many blessings we enjoy.

Use them we pray, for the sake of others, that your love for all your children might be seen in the priorities of the Church nationally and of this congregation locally, for the sake of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Prayers of intercession

Please join in the Responses:

L: Teach us so to pray, loving God.

All: Teach us so to live, loving Christ.

Praying for other people is not an escape from the hard facts of life, but an engagement with them. In that knowledge let us pray for others.

Most loving God, source of resurrection life, together with the prayers we bring to you, we offer you our lives, so that our prayers, and our deeds, may work together in unison for the healing of the world for which Christ lived, died and arose.

L: Teach us so to pray, loving God.

All: Teach us so to live, loving Christ.

Uplift believers around the world that, despite our superficial differences, we may all be drawn closer together in worship and outreach, that the world may see that we are the disciples of the Risen Christ. Uplift your church in its attempts to serve the world.

Strengthen all who work for justice and peace; inspire those who work with the poor and outcast; encourage those who seek to rehabilitate drug addicts; reinvigorate those who are weary, but cannot yet seek rest from their labours.

Be with your church in Scotland, and in Orkney, that she may walk humbly, and hopefully, in faith, through these times of change. Grant, we pray, wisdom and discernment to those who have to make difficult decisions in these challenging times.

We pray for the people and the church in Malawi in the devastating floods there.

² Borg & Crossan, *The Last Week*, 201

We pray for the people of Ukraine, and Sudan and Yemen in Turkey and Syria and many other places affected by war or natural disasters

L: Teach us so to pray, loving God.

All: Teach us so to live, loving Christ.

Uplift Christians and all others who take their place in political life;
in government or in opposition, in Edinburgh and in Westminster;
government ministers and back benchers.

Help them to maintain their faith and integrity in the face of duplicity and self-seeking.

Uplift all people, within or outside the church, who today, and perhaps every day,
watch with the dying, comfort the sorrowful, feed the hungry, tend the sick,
befriend the lonely, teach the young, counsel the bewildered,
encourage the timid, and forgive the enemy.

By your grace, multiply the effect of their individual efforts, that the curse of human misery may
recede and the joy of living increase.

Show *us* what we can do to help in our own place and time.

L: Teach us so to pray, loving God.

All: Teach us so to live, loving Christ.

We bring to you our personal prayers for those for whom we have special concerns.

Pause

And for ourselves, Lord of life, be with us all in our everyday lives,
that in mind and soul we may be young enough to see brave visions
and old enough to dream wise dreams.

Move freely, Holy Friend, and enlist us in the service of Christ's brave new world.

In his name we ask. Amen.³ (*based partly on Bruce Prewer*)

Hymn 622 We sing a love that sets all people free

Choir: *'I stand amazed'*

**Afterthought: Two items;
The Celtic Rune of Hospitality**

I saw a stranger yestreen,
I put food in the eating place,
drink in the drinking place,
music in the music place,
and in the sacred name of the Triune,
He blessed myself and my house,
my cattle and my dear ones,
and the lark said in her song:
often, often, often,
goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.

The walk to Emmaus: a meditation by Steve Garnaas-Holmes:

We gather in the name of the Mother-Father,
the companionship of Christ,
and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We join a journey that began before us,
that stretches back, and also onward.
The Unknown One joins us, and hears.

³ From Bruce Prewer; adapted with permission of the author.

We tender our brokenness.
The Storyteller tells the old story in a new way
and we see in a new way. It is our story.
Our hearts burn within us.
Drawn together, we invite the Stranger to our table,
offering our gifts and hospitality.
We break bread,
and in the sharing we behold the Holy.
Our eyes are opened.
Wonder, reverence, awe and gratitude
swell in us, and raise us up
and send us out to tell others.
We go with haste, rejoicing.
The service is ended.
Go in peace and serve God with joy. Amen.

Closing Hymn: 547 What a friend we have in Jesus

Closing Words and Benediction:

There is no evening tiredness that Christ will not share;
no anxious day that can dawn, without Christ being there.
There is no road to travel, no Christ-empty space,
no enemy to face, without Christ's grace;
there is no joy to celebrate without Christ's grin,
no sorrow to bear without Christ's spirit within.

And may the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and remain with you all,
now and always. Amen.

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Doxology:

(Hy. 786) May the God of peace go with us as we travel from this place;
May the love of Jesus keep us firm in hope and full of grace.

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