

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH,
Handout Orphir 260420 Easter3A
Morning Service 11.15**

Introduction:

In the present circumstances of the Coronavirus pandemic, when we are unable to hold our Church services, we think of other Christian people all over the world, and especially family and friends who are separated from us. I invite you to use this service in whatever way is best for you. Please feel free to pass it to other people.

Today we continue to celebrate Easter as we read in St Luke's Gospel of the journey to Emmaus, and how the unrecognised risen Christ is revealed as he breaks bread.

You may like to look up the hymns and read – or sing them.

God bless you all.

Gathering Prayer

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

Lord, as we read and reflect on your word, come to us, that we may know you. Amen.

Call to worship

Gathered in our separate places, yet united in our fellowship, come, worship our God of resurrection power;

come, rejoicing in his wonders, and in the hope he gives us.

Let us worship God:

Hymn 409 Jesus is risen, alleluia!

Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer

We bless Your name, Lord Jesus.

With open hearts, minds and spirits,

in our separate places, we come to praise you,

grateful that your arms are thrown wide in welcome.

It is in the knowledge of your love, and the security of your embrace that we acknowledge that we do not always deserve such warmth or acceptance.

In many ways we sometimes let you down:

in the words we have spoken,

in the way we have treated others,

and in the selfish things we have done,

we have failed to reflect your goodness

Trusting in your forgiving love, we ask for the courage to choose to do better.

Help us to remember every minute of every day,

that we are yours:

loved by you, called by you.

Let that love and that calling make us

more generous towards others, and more loving towards you.

At this time of restrictions because of Coronavirus

We thank you that you come out and meet us where we are.

We thank you that you walk the road with us,

that you treat each of us as an equal,

even when we fail to recognise you.

You always love us, always care for us,
always want to eat and drink with us:
such is your love.

Thank you, Lord, that you are with us
not as a stranger, but as our friend.

We worship and adore you.

Be Lord of our lives, this day and forever.

We ask in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray, saying:

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.

Hymn 549 How deep the Father's love for us

Readings:

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.

Contemporary Reading: *Transformation by Donna Sinclair* (slightly adapted).

Donna Sinclair is an award-winning writer who has written a number of books on spirituality.

Great changes occur, at times, in our relationship with God. Not easily, of course. We suffer sickness or grief, we have strange dreams, and then one day, in the midst of our brokenness, there is a sliver or a burst of light. God is closer than before.

This rhythm of wondering darkness and the light that follows is what faith is about. On Sundays we seek transformation – the turning of our souls toward God. We sift the Christian story for it, re-enacting year by year the pain and exaltation of the birth, the death, the resurrection.

This month we [have recounted] once more how Jesus died, how his body was placed in a tomb that Joseph had recently dug out of solid rock. Later, as startled as if we had never heard it before, we [sang] again the story of Jesus rising transformed from that hollow dark place.

It is God who does the transforming.

Knowing that may help us survive our necessary times of darkness. We cannot fight our Good Fridays, our own descent into the underworld. But we can trust that we will arise, closer than before to the God who makes, with holy purpose, both radiance and tomb.

Hymn 416 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing (Truro 214)

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 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*

Message

The story of the walk to Emmaus is one of the best known and best loved stories of the New Testament. It summarises the whole Christian life in just over twenty verses.

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 a certain house 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, and find that it really is empty.

Two of the people who know all about what happened set out to walk to Emmaus, about 7 miles west of Jerusalem. The exact location is not known, but it doesn't really matter - indeed that is the point. They were **on the "road"** – pilgrims on the road of life. Jesus is the Way, the Road. One of them is called Cleopas, and it seems likely that the other is his wife. Confused and depressed, they are talking about what has happened – recounting the women's tales that Jesus has risen from the dead.

As they are walking and talking, they are joined by another man. **We** know that this is the risen Jesus, but they don't recognise him. Why? Maybe, walking west, the setting sun would be in their eyes. But there is more to it than that. What prevented them from recognising him? Because they thought he was dead? Or their pre-conceived idea of what Jesus should look like? As he walks with them, the man asks them, "What have you been discussing? I saw you walking and talking earnestly."

They are astonished. How can he not know what's 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's sigh, and his words:

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

Now they listen as he gives them a Scripture lesson. He explains that all 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 Jewish expectation was 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. Gradually they begin to understand that he is talking about their beloved friend and teacher. Everything begins to fall into place: Jesus's words about himself as he taught and healed so many illnesses; his continued references to his Father; Jesus's suffering and crucifixion. They realise that all of this, even Jesus's 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 was it that they didn't recognize him as he walked with them those long miles? They don't understand, but it doesn't 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 strange story. A wonderful 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?

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 do not 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 are 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 are 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? Some scholars have suggested that the story is intended as a parable: "*an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.*" A story that seems to be about one thing, but is actually 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 these uncertain times, as we worry about the spread of Coronavirus, 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, and is 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, and now, with the Coronavirus restrictions, we don't have even that. The shared meal – table fellowship – was a central part of Jesus' practical ministry. We need to find other opportunities for genuine Christian caring and sharing. Maybe we need to lift the phone to somebody who's stuck indoors, 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 wonderful 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."

Emmaus happens whenever we recognize the risen Christ among 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?

Amen. To God be the Glory.

(Offering) Hymn 419 Thine be the glory

Dedication of Offering

Gifts for You, our Father,
given 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

Living Lord,
You call us to speak to you in prayer—
even when the places we would usually go to are not available.
Help us to know your Spirit's presence wherever we pray.

God of all hope,
we call on you today especially for those who are living in fear –
fear of illness; fear for loved ones,
We pray for those who may not yet have understood the urgency of the situation:
protect them, and protect all of us from harm.
May your Spirit give us a sense of calmness and peace.

We pray for your church in this time of uncertainty,
And with buildings closed and meetings cancelled
we pray for those who feel the more isolated by not being able to attend.

Holy God, we remember that you have promised that nothing will separate us from your love
demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ.
Help us turn our eyes, hearts, and minds to you.

God, our rock and shield, we pray for our own land,
and for all nations and places in our world,
as many endure the effects of the illness Covid-19, and the Coronavirus pandemic.

For those who are ill, grant healing;
for those who mourn the death of loved ones, bring comfort;
for those who care for the sick, grant strength and endurance;
for those who are isolated or whose livelihoods are threatened, give courage and hope;
for all who take difficult decisions,
from governments to health practitioners,
give wisdom and compassion to accompany the knowledge and experience that they bring.

Deliver us all from this disease, we pray,
and enable all nations and communities
to grow in collaboration and unity as we face this challenge together.
Grant a legacy of enduring common purpose
in facing all that threatens our global common good.

We bring to you our special concern at this time
for all those known to us who are ill,
or lonely, or worried, or sad,
or in any kind of need.

Pause

We pray in Jesus' name, in the unity of the Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymn: 547 What a friend we have in Jesus

Closing Words and Benediction:

Lord Jesus,
Today we have walked and talked along the Emmaus road.
We walk and talk each week, each day, with Christ by our side.
Let him walk with you this week; let him speak to you,
and allow him to open the door of your heart,
so that you also may meet the extraordinary in the ordinary.
May you know God's hope, Christ's love and the Holy Spirit's energy
this week and always.

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

Doxology:

May God's blessing surround you each day,
As you trust Him and walk in his way,
May his presence within guard and keep you from sin,
Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.