

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

29:04:2020

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On Sunday afternoon I sat down in a quiet place with the express intention of reading the Gospel lectionary passage for the day (Luke 24:13-35) and was immediately reminded of the mysterious beauty of this Lukan narrative. As I revisited the Emmaus Road story I was pained, amused and hopeful in equal measure. It was *painful* because I was reminded of our corporate *deprivation* – in the light of the social contract that we are all bound to, it is not possible at the moment for us to gather as God's people to share in the Eucharistic feast of bread and wine. According to Luke, it is the familiar Eucharistic actions of Christ that open the eyes of the two companions and enable them to experience the presence of the Risen Christ (v.30-31). As a minister of Word and Sacrament I yearn for the day when I can gather with ordinary Methodist folk to share in Holy Communion once more but in the meantime I bear the pain of living without this means of grace.

The Lukan story also *amused* me for the narrative revolves around the deeply human story of two travelling companions walking the same road together. Over the last four weeks of lockdown Jean and I have been assiduous in our taking of daily exercise – it is as though in a time of great social restriction we have not wanted to miss out on this one taste of freedom! Consequently we have taken many walks together – we have got to know our neighbourhood far better, we have noticed interesting architecture and houses, we have discovered new pathways and alleyways and often we have been struck by the silence or the plaintive sound of birdsong. Sometimes we have walked in silence and yet at other times our conversation has been animated with the affairs of the day; but always there has been the simple pleasure of being walking companions on the road.

Finally the Lukan story is a deeply *hopeful* narrative because it tells the story of two travelling companions who encounter the Risen Christ in the midst of deep personal pain and bewildering confusion. Here are two walking companions who share a common despair as they live with the memories of Holy Week in Jerusalem – it is as though their grief and despair is so oppressive that they are unable to perceive very much else. It is at this very moment when the Risen Christ accompanies them on the journey and walks alongside them. It is in the midst of this thick atmosphere of pain and grief that the incarnate Lord, the crucified and risen Christ, listens to their story, contains their pain and invites them to see things from a different perspective. This pilgrimage culminates in the shared experience of hosting the stranger; only to find themselves hosted by the Risen Christ who offers blessed and broken bread at the table. Such is the transformative nature of this encounter that the two disciples are compelled to retrace their steps and re-join the followers of Christ in Jerusalem so that they can share their Easter joy and faith.

Friends I do hope and pray that as you journey through these strange and disturbing times you will know the company of Christ crucified and risen. It may not be immediately obvious as to where, how and in whom Christ makes his presence known but be attentive; watch, wait, listen and pray. When we finally emerge from this national crisis and we enter the new normal (whatever that is); we will know that we have been on a long and arduous journey and we will all have our tales to share of COVID -19 and its effects upon us and the people we love. I hope that in the telling of those stories we come to recognise the great Shepherd who has not forsaken us and has held us fast in his love,

With kind regards, Julian