



If you can, begin with a moment of silence and by lighting a candle if you have one, and listen to the words of this Easter hymn:

Love's redeeming work is done;
fought the fight, the battle won:
lo, our Sun's eclipse is o'er,
lo, he sets in blood no more.

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
death in vain forbids his rise;
Christ has opened paradise.

Lives again our glorious King;
where, O death, is now thy sting?
dying once, he all doth save;
where thy victory, O grave?

Soar we now where Christ has led,
following our exalted Head;
made like him, like him we rise;
ours the cross, the grave, the skies.

Hail the Lord of earth and heaven!
Praise to thee by both be given:
thee we greet triumphant now;
hail, the Resurrection Thou!

Introduction

Today is the Third Sunday of Easter and the 6th Sunday of not being able to meet in church for Sunday worship. In a way, our experience of Easter now is not so different from that of the first disciples. They didn't have churches to go to because they hadn't been built and, as we heard last week, they had to meet behind locked doors for fear of persecution. For a long time, Christians often met secretly; they didn't have wonderful buildings like ours and for the most part their faith was expressed privately in their homes, and in conversations – as it is for us at the moment.

The gospel for today tells the story of two people who were walking away from Jerusalem to Emmaus. I wonder if you can imagine them walking; they probably had to make sure no one could hear them talking and probably they were continually looking over a shoulder to see if they

Charles Wesley, M.A. was the great hymn-writer of the Wesley family, perhaps, taking quantity and quality into consideration, the great hymn-writer of all ages. Charles Wesley was the youngest son and 18th child of Samuel and Susanna Wesley, and was born at Epworth Rectory, Dec. 18, 1707. In 1729 he became one of the first band of "Oxford Methodists." He died in London, March 29, 1788, and was buried in Marylebone churchyard. His brother John was deeply grieved because he would not consent to be interred in the burial-ground of the City Road Chapel, where he had prepared a grave for himself, but Charles said, "I have lived, and I die, in the Communion of the Church of England, and I will be buried in the yard of my parish church." Eight clergymen of the Church of England bore his pall. He had a large family, four of whom survived him; three sons, who all became distinguished in the musical world, and one daughter, who inherited some of her father's poetical genius.

He is said to have written some 6500 hymns of which the most famous include: 'O for a thousand tongues to sing' and 'And can it be?'



were being followed. As they walked along that road, they were tackling this question: How on earth could Jesus have come back from the dead?

The Gospel Reading Luke 24:13-35

Shorter summary version

Two friends were walking to a village called Emmaus. They were talking about how Jesus had died on the cross. As they walked, Jesus appeared and walked with them, but they didn't know who he was. Jesus wanted to know what they were talking about. One of the friends, Cleopas, said: "Are you the only person in Jerusalem who doesn't know what happened? "What things?" Jesus asked. Jesus was crucified. But after three days, some women went to his tomb – and found it empty. As they came into the village they asked Jesus to stay with them. Jesus sat down to eat with them. He took the bread and said a blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they recognized him ... and then he disappeared. The friends went back to Jerusalem and everyone what had happened on the road, and how they had recognized Jesus when he broke the bread. Everyone was saying: "The Lord is risen indeed!

Full version

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.^[b] ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,^[c] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.^[d] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." ²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah^[e] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us^[f] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Reflection

I'm one of those disciples who were walking along the road to Emmaus – my name is Mrs Cleopas.

We were walking along, feeling very depressed – sunk in gloom. If you had seen us you would have known from our body language how we were feeling. We were talking about what had just happened – our friend and leader – Jesus, had just been crucified – it had been awful. He had been so special – our lives had been changed so much because of knowing Him and now He was dead.

Suddenly a stranger joined us – he asked us what we were discussing – we were amazed when he then asked us – what things? How could he not know what had happened - had he been going around blindfolded?

As we got to the village of Emmaus we invited him to stay with us and have a meal. After a great deal of encouragement he agreed. He joined us at the table – took bread, gave thanks, broke it and then gave it to us. As he did that familiar routine we suddenly realised that it was Jesus – we recognised Him through the actions we saw.

He then suddenly disappeared and we were amazed that we hadn't recognised him sooner – for after all our hearts had been burning within us as he explained things to us – why hadn't we realised? He was alive. He is alive.

It was good to talk to Him about all the things that had been happening – have you talked to Jesus about the things that are happening in the world at the moment? Are you aware of His understanding of the situation?

We invited Him to stay with us – have you invited Him to stay with you in your isolation?

Have you urged Him to stay with you?

Have you recognised Him at work in this situation – by His actions

- Through the care and dedication of the NHS and other frontline workers – in their care for the dying and the living.
- Through the numerous acts of kindness being done for the vulnerable and self-isolating – the shopping, giving to foodbanks, keeping in touch.
- Through the way most people are responding positively to the request, the order, to Stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives.
- Through the way the earth is being healed because of the rest it is getting from pollution – the rivers and canals are so much clearer and the levels of pollution are so much lower.

As we walked along that road we felt that we had lost so much – our dreams, even our faith. I expect some of you are feeling the same.

We were able to have a meal with Jesus – we didn't have to socially distance ourselves! But one day, hopefully quite soon you will be able to have meals with each other again - with your families and friends and meet together for a church service to worship God together – how good that will be!

Prayers

Let us pray ...

As we make our journey through this difficult time let us pray that God in the Risen Christ will travel with us; that he will guide, challenge and comfort us.

As we make our journey asking questions about what all of this means for us and for our world let us pray that God in the Risen Christ will journey with us; that he will teach us and help us to understand.

As we see or hear about people who are suffering as they make their journey let us pray for their healing for those who help them; for all who work in our hospitals and care homes; for those in prisons, homeless shelters and refugee camps; for those on this journey whose mental health is suffering and for others in relationships who fear for their safety. Let us pray that God in the risen Christ will journey with them and bring peace to hearts, minds and lives.

As children return to their lessons at home, online and for some in schools let us pray that God in the Risen Christ will be with them, with their parents, their families and their teachers.

As couples postpone their weddings in our churches and try to reorganise their plans let us pray that God in the risen Christ will journey with them.

As we journey, open the eyes of our faith that in this new week, we may see the living Christ in all his redeeming work.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Final Prayer and Blessing

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, make us perfect in every good work to do his will. Help us to see you in the people around us and on the journeys we make. And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon us, and remain with us always. Amen.

They recognised him in something as simple and as every day – in the breaking of bread.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Alleluia. Alleluia.

In the name of Christ. Amen. Alleluia. Alleluia.