

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – April 26 2020 ('Easter 3')

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for the second Sunday after Easter, 2020.

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript, and I would like to thank Erica, Rebecca and Janet for joining me in the making of this week's edition.

In the season of Easter we continue to praise God for the resurrection of his Son. Once again the Psalms have something to say about God's saving power. These words are from Psalm 30:

Call to Worship: Words from Psalm 30

[From Psalm 30, a responsive version from the Iona Abbey Worship Book (2001 edition) published by the Iona Community and reproduced by permission.]

I cried to you for help, O God,
and you, O God, have healed me.

I was on the way to the depths below,
but you have restored my life.

The moment of anger becomes a lifetime of goodness.

The tears of night turn to joy with the dawn.

You have changed my sadness to a joyful dance.

You have taken away my sorrow and surrounded me with joy.

My soul will sing your praise and never be silent,

O God, my God, I will give you thanks for ever.

Musicⁱ – *Whistle Theme* from the soundtrack album *Local Hero* by Mark Knopfler.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession

Lord God, once again we find words in the Psalms which tell us about you and your relationship with us. Words that give us confidence that even in the darkest times we can turn to you. We praise you for all that you are, all that you have done and all that you do, even though we can not find words to describe or quantify your greatness and your love.

Worship is part of what we owe you, part of the response that is all that you ask.

For you know what we are like. You know that we don't get it right all of the time. In another Psalm we read how you search us and you know us. And have always known us since birth and before.

We want to confess the things we get wrong – not to keep you informed but to be as open with you as you are with us.

Lord God we want to know you. More and more. So that we can find ways to serve you by being like you. Open and loving, generous and caring. And forgiving. Through the life and teaching, the death and resurrection of your Son we have both an example of what we can do in your world and reassurance that it is possible.

In his name we offer these and all our prayers, and as he taught us, so we say together...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who 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 trespasses as we forgive those who 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.

Scriptureⁱⁱ: Luke 24:13-35

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognising him.

¹⁷ He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?' They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?'

¹⁹ 'What things?' he asked.

'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.'

²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.'

Reflection (1)

Of those of our listeners who drive, many will have learnt in Coventry. The reason I mention this is, if you did, you probably had one or two lessons quite near where I live. There is this long straight road, called Warwick Avenue, along which I used to drive when I was on my way to the old day job, which I still use when I am heading to one or two of my churches.

The thing about this road is, it's not just long, it's also **wide**. And it's the place that most of Coventry's driving instructors seem to go to let their pupils have their first go at "turning in the road using forward and reverse gears" - what we more commonly call the "three-point turn".

I don't know about a three-point turn, I could just about do a **U**-turn in Warwick Avenue. It's not quite as wide as one carriageway of the M6, but it's a close run thing. So I sometimes get just the tiniest bit frustrated when I see these poor souls, marooned in mid-

manoeuvre, at right angles to the pavement. I try to be patient, but sometimes the switch from reverse to first gear takes about 5 minutes, and with the rest of the Earlsdon traffic I make my way past.

I should be more patient. I should be more considerate. And I should remember how it once was for me - that turning round in the road, or reversing into a parking space, or whatever, was once a real mystery, and I never thought I would get it right. But sometimes, and I am sure it's true of a lot of us, we are still surprised at how slow to learn some learners seem to be.

Even before we get to the Easter stories, while we are hearing about the life of Jesus, his three years or so of preaching, with his small band of followers in tow, I think we are puzzled at how slow to learn the disciples sometimes were. Even Jesus once or twice seems to get a bit tetchy. Philip says (in John 14) "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." and Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

I think we are sometimes rather taken aback that these two travellers on the Emmaus road were able to walk and talk with Jesus, presumably look him in the face, and yet not recognise him. We are told they were "kept from recognising him". There are many clever theories as to how this could be. There is the "sun setting in their faces" theory, since it was evening and the village they were going to is said to be to the West of Jerusalem. There is the theory that Jesus actually looked like somebody different - that he was in disguise. There is also the theory that this whole story is simply made up. It's an allegorical invention of Luke, put together along with his later story of Philip and the Ethiopian, where once again, as you'll recall, someone explains the scriptures to a traveller.

But to me what kept them from recognizing Jesus might have simply been the impossibility of the whole thing. The simplest solutions are the best and even if there was something familiar about this fellow-traveller... it couldn't be. It couldn't be Jesus.

In all of the music I have chosen this week I am trying to keep on the side of calm reflection and peace. Before we move on to look at the rest of this story let's listen to a familiar tune.

Music – from *Amazing Grace*, arranged and played by Rick Wakeman - from the album *Piano Portraits*.

Scripture: Luke 24.25-35

²⁵ He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

Reflection (2)

So it seems that Cleopas and the other not only didn't recognise Jesus, they weren't **ready** to recognise him. They didn't see his resurrection as a predictable thing. They weren't looking for it. They hadn't grasped Jesus' place, Jesus' role in the whole thing.

So that is what Jesus set out to show them. Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Why should he bother? Why should Jesus lecture them like this? Isn't it enough to have them rushing back to Jerusalem, singing the praise of God and declaring Jesus' resurrection? No it isn't.

Jesus, I am sure, wanted to show them or remind them that although the detail of the cross and the events leading up to his death had come as rather a surprise, nevertheless what **shouldn't** have come as a surprise was God's involvement with his creation, God's love for his creation, that he was prepared to take so far that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believed in him would have the chance of eternal life.

This involvement, and this love, had been evident from the earliest times. God had been trying to guide his people for generations. He brought them safely out of Egypt. He gave them prophets, trying to bring them and their rulers back to concentrate on the things that mattered - care for the widows, the fatherless, the marginalised, the poor. Listen to the prayer of thanksgiving during your next Communion service and you will find we recall all of this, and no communion is really complete without acknowledging the whole sweep of the history of God and his people.

In the Emmaus story we have Jesus himself taking up a theme that others were later to take up. This theme was that Jesus and his life, death and resurrection were not just part of the story of someone that Cleopas called "a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people".

Jesus was a focus of the **whole relationship** that God himself set up between himself and mankind. He was always to be a part of it, right from the beginning. If I'm not careful, I'll find myself lapsing into the beginning of John, chapter 1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

wind that on a few verses...

"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."

It is in the inter-relatedness of all parts of their religious experience and heritage that Jesus wanted Cleopas and his friend to find him.

And they did find him, and recognise him.. Slow to learn, slow starters, but they recognised him in breaking bread. Just eating with him. Not through enacting a communion service or re-enacting the Last Supper. They hadn't been there, so far as we know.

And perhaps that's the best lesson for us to take away from this encounter on the Emmaus road. To look for Jesus in the ordinary things, like sitting down and eating. To be prepared to meet with Jesus in the everyday – in normality, in community, not just in Communion.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

We pray...

Lord God, you know what we think, you know what we say we want before we say it. But most of all you know what we need. Give us wisdom to have your vision of the right priorities – the right actions and attitudes that put people before things. All over the world. All over **YOUR** world.

We pray for the church and for the world, for the church in the world, for every facet of both, for every situation where your people need help whether or not those needs have reached our headlines today. We pray for grace to discern where you are calling us to act for you in this locked-down community, and for tolerance and patience to cope with impotence and isolation and constraint and – sometimes - the same-ness of each succeeding day.

As days and weeks pass we pray for those hoping to shorten the waiting time before our economy and our lives can take steps back towards what we once called normal. Give us strength to deal with new realities.

We ask a blessing of wisdom and a clear vision for those who govern our country and manage our community, for those whose inclination and instinct is to be proactive, prisoners now of the need to react to what each day brings.

We remember in our prayers the many families and individuals who have suffered, are suffering and will come to suffer illness and death, anxiety and grief during this time. We thank you that so many are inspired and enabled to help others and remember especially those working for and in the National Health Service and in residential care. Protect them and guard them, Lord.

In the silence hear the prayers of our hearts for those who are dear to us.

(Silence)

Lord, hear these prayers we bring to you in Jesus' name

Amen

This song is based on Psalm 139, which we alluded to in our prayers.

Hymn *O God, you search me and you know me* Bernadette Farrell

[Unfortunately our licensing arrangements don't permit the reproduction of these words in this transcript]

Blessing

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to himself;
may the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen us in his service;
may the joy of the Lord Jesus fill our souls;

and may the blessing of God Almighty; Father Son and Holy Spirit be with us and those
we love today and for ever.

Amen

Closing Music: *Gymnopedie No 1*, Erik Satie, played by Andres Vela Segovia

ⁱ All music included in this podcast is made available for download under the terms of the PRS for Music Limited Online Music Licence number LE-0019067

ⁱⁱ Bible quotations are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition.