



## Service for Private or Personal Use Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April

Many people have been moved by Captain Tom Moore, who at the age of nearly 100 decided to complete 100 'laps' of his garden in an attempt to raise £1000 in sponsorship for the NHS. Through TV publicity the sums raised have risen tremendously (as I start this it has passed 25 million pounds, which will doubtless be far more when this service reaches you). His favourite song is "You'll never walk alone." Our Bible reading from Luke 24 is the story of two people who, on the evening of Easter Day, did not walk alone, and the surprise they received.

*How much of the story of 'The Road to Emmaus' can you remember before we read it? Allow your imagination to walk that road, for Jesus to join you (no need to keep 2 metres!). Will you, at the end, invite him to stay?*

**Hymn** Choose an uplifting hymn of worship, such as *The day of resurrection* (H&P 208 StF 311) or *This joyful Eastertide* (H&P 213 StF 314)

### **Prayer**

Almighty God, as another Sunday comes and I still can't go to church, I remember that you can be met anywhere. As I take my daily exercise, you walk beside me. In my home, you are a welcome guest. Whether I am alone, or with others, you are there; for all of time and all of space is yours. Your promise to every believer is, "I will never fail you nor forsake you." "I am with you always, even to the close of the age."

Forgive me when I am so preoccupied with the restrictions placed on me that I forget you.

Forgive me when I grumble about what is not available to me, and I forget the many blessings you still send.

Forgive me when I treat you as a stranger and hesitate to make you welcome.

Forgive me that I so rarely listen carefully enough to the Scriptures, for them to set my heart burning.

Then may the risen Christ make known to me the scars that tell my sins forgiven.

May he help me to see how the Scriptures point to him. May he make my home and my heart his throne.

Amen.

**Bible Reading** We first read from the first letter of Peter, Chapter 1 verses 17 to 23. For the second time in this letter attention is given to the resurrection. The first time (v 3) was to strengthen hope and sustain faith. This time it is part of the call to holy living, knowing that we have been set free – that's what redeemed means, set free at great cost. The power that raised Jesus from the dead after his sacrificial work was completed, is at work in us, who have begun a new life, born anew (as again in v 3).

**Hymn** *All ye that seek the Lord who died* (H&P 188 StF 294) or some other of your choice

**Bible Reading** Luke Chapter 24 verses 13 to 35. *Read it slowly, pausing where necessary. It is a great dramatic piece of our Bible. How does it feel to walk that road,*

*bewildered by all that has happened to Jesus? Are you willing to invite him to stay? What is it that sparks recognition?*

*You might like to Google paintings of 'The Road to Emmaus' and see what great artists have made of the story.*

Lord, as you spoke with them on the road, and opened up the Scriptures that spoke of you, they felt their hearts burn within them. May this passage that speaks of you set our hearts ablaze with faith and love. Amen.

It is a greatly loved story. As we started I asked you how much you remembered without needing to be prompted by actually reading; probably you remembered almost all of it. Part of that is down to the skill with which Luke recounts the story, bringing out all the drama. Part of it is the sheer familiarity of the story. But a further part, surely, is the way we can identify with the two travellers.

A week previously their hopes had been sky-high. This was the moment when God was going to act, would bring freedom to Israel and establish his kingdom. Christ's coronation was at hand. During the next few days, although there were rumours of plots against him, in every confrontation with the authorities Jesus had got much the better of the argument. He was popular with the people, who had seen so many of his miracles.

What they couldn't understand was how and why everything had changed so suddenly. How did it come about that he should have been arrested, condemned and crucified, so swiftly? It made no sense. It was utterly unfair.

And as if that was not enough, now there were reports that his body had gone missing. Women had gone to the tomb, but it was empty. They said that angels had told them that Jesus was alive. What were sensible people to make of such a story?

Their outline of the story was correct. It was their interpretation of the facts that was the problem. They were so trapped by their skewed understanding that they were in danger of missing the truth. Little by little this unrecognized stranger teased the story out of them. Gently he led them on from their grief-induced dullness to the warmth of recognition.

*Am I trapped in doubts and hesitations because although I know the story, I have never welcomed the person at its centre?*

We can sympathise with them. Unlike them, we know how the story will unfold and how they will recognize him. Unlike them, we know all those other Easter stories. It doesn't take us by surprise, and we should make allowances for how little they knew. How was it that they failed to recognize him? We don't know. Their grief is not really an adequate explanation. Possibly his appearance had changed – certainly his bruised and battered face must have done, and how did nail-pierced feet cope with that long walk on a dusty road? Possibly it is also like a parable, that unbelief fails to recognize him, even when he is close by and when he is the subject of conversation. I sat through many services and sermons, and read from my Bible many times, before I acknowledged him, and trusted him as my Lord and Saviour; and there have been ministers *converted* while they were preaching.

I would love to know what Jesus said to them. What were the Old Testament passages he explained to them? How did he interpret them? What insights the proverbial 'fly on the wall' could give us! The way later writers in the New Testament refer to Old Testament passages gives us some clues, but there must have been much more.

When people tell us that they have no use for the Old Testament, they are really missing out on something Jesus regarded as vitally important. In fact, he was disappointed that these two had failed to see how these writings described what had happened to him, both in his sufferings *and* in his resurrection.

As they approach Emmaus Jesus acted as if he would walk on. He never forces himself on anyone. You probably know Holman Hunt's famous painting, *The Light of the World*. Inspired by the words of Revelation 3 verse 20. It shows Jesus standing by a weed-strewn door, knocking. The artist deliberately painted it with no handle on his side of the door, for the door of the human heart can only be opened from the inside. He seeks admittance, but waits for the invitation.

So Cleopas and – surely it had to be his wife? – invite him to “Abide with (us)” and hastily prepare a simple meal. Instead of Cleopas thanking God for the gift of food, and asking blessing on their time together, it is Jesus who takes the bread, blesses and breaks it. In that instant they realize who has been with them all this time, that even while they were talking *about* him they were talking *to* him; that as they listened to the explanation, the subject of those old scriptures was interpreting the words to them.

How did they recognize him? What was it that opened their eyes? Various guesses have been made. Did they notice the nail prints in those hands? Were they reminded of the Upper Room, only a few days earlier? Was there something distinctive about the way he did it, that they had perhaps seen many times before? I think that Luke may have been deliberately vague about this, so that each time we as a church “break bread” we may know Jesus in his risen glory, however we interpret the details of the act.

In the 1950's and 60's Malcolm Muggeridge was the great sceptic about the Christian faith, attracting as much publicity for his views and often outrageous comments then as Richard Dawkins does now. Gradually his defences came down, and in 1968 he was asked by the BBC to produce a series of three programmes in the Holy Land. He tells in *Jesus Rediscovered* how as he and his companion travelled the road to Emmaus they also sensed a third person with them. The remainder of his life was dedicated to being a disciple, a follower of Jesus. ‘On every walk, Christ came to tell us, whether to Emmaus or Wimbledon or Timbuktu, there is the same stranger waiting to accompany us along our way, if we want him.’

It was like that in 1909 when Ernest Shackleton led a company of his men across the Antarctic Ocean, and the mountains of South Georgia, seeking rescue for his stranded men. Though not especially ‘religious’ each of the group later admitted that they had been aware of an extra person with them through that perilous journey.

How real the experience was for Cleopas became clear. They abandon their meal, and dash back to Jerusalem. They find the disciples – apparently not just the core, but also “those who were with them” except, of course, for Thomas – in the Upper Room. Bursting with their news they are greeted with, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” The encounter with the women has already been air-brushed out, sad to say. They add their story, because everybody's story is unique, and everybody's story matters – yours and mine, too. The story tumbles out with all the breathless excitement we normally associate with children who can't contain their excitement. I wonder if there was a slight tinge of disappointment, that they weren't the first with the news? Even so, they had their ‘Scoop,’ their personal encounter with

the risen Lord. Nobody could ever take that from them; and nobody could take them from his love and care.

Every time they picked up bread, even before they broke it, surely they would remember that moment. And breaking it, they would think again of the scars that told of his love, his sacrifice, and his victory. Do you? He did it for you.

### **The Collect**

God of life and love,  
your Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread.  
Open our eyes that we may see him in his redeeming work;  
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

### **Prayer**

O God who has so often walked alongside us unrecognised, we too have been slow of heart to perceive what you are doing and what you have been saying.

Walk with us, God of surprises, for we are uncertain of the route or the outcome. Walk, please, with all who suffer; those in hospital or care homes; those isolated at home; those waiting anxiously for news about loved ones; those mourning the death of someone special.

Walk, please, with the over-burdened members of the health and caring services. As you healed the sick, so stay alongside those trying to restore health, those looking for cures and vaccines, those supplying the vital equipment; with GPs dealing with other medical needs; with the ambulance crews and paramedics who are often the front line of contact.

Walk, please, with the supply chain; the food we depend on, its production and its distribution; transport for essential workers; refuse collectors, maintaining sanitation.

Walk, please, with those who cannot cope; with those who need the food banks more desperately than ever; with those unable to make ends meet financially; with parents attempting home education; with refugees.

With each piece of bread we eat, remind us that you are alive, and that you gave your life to make us free.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn** *Lord Jesus Christ, You have come to us* (H&P 617 StF 594) is a hymn of response with a reference to breaking bread in verse 2

**The grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all evermore. Amen.

### **Readings for next week**

John 10 verses 1 to 10

Acts 2 verses 42 to 47

Psalm 23

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2 verses 19 to 25