

Year A Easter 3, 19th April 2026

Acts 2:42-74. 1 Peter 2:19-25. John 10:1-10

We Had Hoped...

I am always happy to preach on this fourth Sunday of the Easter season in Year A, to preach about the encounter between Cleopas and we assume his wife, and the Risen Lord.

Of course, I like the notion that the couple are walking together; walking from Jerusalem, about seven miles to their home in Emmaus. About half the distance I would do on an average day's walking on el camino. Cleopas and his wife are disconsolate. Remember, they are walking home having witnessed the death of their spiritual leader, Jesus, in whom they had very high hopes. In such a depressed and sorry state, each step would have been tiring, as if they were wearing lead boots. They were talking about the events that led up to the death of Jesus, and how all their hopes were dashed. They had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel. They could not understand the reports of that first Easter Day, by some of the women disciples, that the tomb was empty.

When we are upset, sad, or depressed, our world can become very small. We can struggle to understand what has happened, to put it into context, to lift our heads up and gain a different perspective. We can hear it in the words spoken by Cleopas and his wife, "But, we had hoped...". Any sentence starting with that is going to describe unmet wishes or dreams. It can also be a time of realisation that we had unconsciously built a picture, a vision even, of what the future would look like, and now... that future vision, that expectation of what the future would be like, comes crashing down. It is a time of grief for a future that won't now happen. I am sure, given that life throws these things at us all at some time in our lives, we have all experienced something of this type of event in our lives.

Cleopas and his wife were struggling to come to terms with all that had taken place. And in their sadness and form of myopia, they did not recognise Jesus,

and I suspect it took them a while to realise Jesus was even walking with them; their thoughts were so introspective.

When Jesus spoke with them and opened up the scriptures and set out the whole arc of the story of the people of the tribe of Israel and the Messiah's role and fate, something stirred in both of Jesus' listeners. However, they were still processing their grief and they were very slow to comprehend and take in everything Jesus said. But, clearly, Jesus' words made sufficient impact that Cleopas and his wife insisted that their fellow traveller receive hospitality from them as it was now twilight and would soon be dark.

It was only when they were seated, and their walking companion took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, that their eyes were opened and they recognised Jesus. This is one of those moments when all of a sudden, the picture becomes clear, when there is recognition, when there is understanding, and recent events all fell into place. Their sadness is transformed into joy. They no longer have feet of clay or lead. They got up, and in the dark they walked back the seven miles to Jerusalem – I am sure at a much faster pace than when they left Jerusalem earlier that afternoon, to share their experience of the risen Lord with the disciples still hiding away in the upper room.

It was a simple act at Cleopas' table that Jesus made himself known; in the breaking of bread, sharing a sip of wine, sitting at a common table, sharing a simple meal.

Maybe we expect God, Jesus and or the Holy Spirit to turn up with a whole host of angels sing 'Glory to God'; that the transformative power of God will be loud, with proclamations and something really significant.

Really? This story shows us that we can be transformed through the simple everyday things; the divine can be revealed to us by the common place, by the small but personal actions and simple conversations. This story reminds us that God is in the day to day rhythms and the every day rituals, more than in the big showy stuff. God showed up to Cleopas on a walk home. God was made known at a very simple meal at a very simple table, in a wee village a few hours walk from Jerusalem.

So, be ready to meet God everywhere, and to be God's agent in all the day to day things you can do. Smiling at someone looking sad at a bus stop, making a phone call or a visit you meant to make but were too busy, to a lonely friend or neighbour, distracting a fractious child on the bus so its weary mother can get a moment's peace. The sacred happens in these interactions and the small decisions we make each day to make what to us seem small differences to someone's day. But to them, it might be what they need to get through that hour or that day. The risen Christ is not confined by the humdrum of the everyday aspects of our lives. Just know that whenever and wherever you make room, you pause and decide to act in a way that reflects God's kingdom, Jesus is there. Listen to your heart, it may not burn with an intensity that Cleopas' probably did, but attend to it, trust in the power of the risen Christ to guide you.

And recognise that you will also be visited – Jesus isn't trapped on the road to Emmaus. He is ready to walk with you, to talk with you, and to open your eyes and heart, to share a simple meal with you – to break bread, to share wine. And all you need to do, like Cleopas and his wife, is say to Jesus 'Stay with me' and invite him in to your life. Jesus yearns for you to make that invitation. Just like that Holman Hunt painting, Jesus waits at your door, but you are the only one who can open it and invite him in.

And this morning, just like every Sunday morning, Jesus meets us as we break and eat the consecrated bread. A simple act, with a profound impact. A communion, a spiritual coming together, that we celebrate and partake in. May you receive the body of our risen lord, however you understand it, in awe and with joy and a with a thankful heart. Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!