**23rd April 2023**

**Call to worship**

Come to worship the risen Christ
with open eyes and ears, minds and hearts.
Come, prepared, expecting, desiring –
to discover and know more of Christ.



**A gathering prayer**

Loving Lord,
as we come to worship,
help us to see and hear not only the familiar
but the unexpected, the new, the different.
Help us to understand and have a new awareness
of you and of your story,
of your love and your presence in our lives.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of approach**

We gather together today, Lord,
the events of Easter still fresh in our minds.
We still have our questions.
We wonder how we can join the dots,
learn the best way to live the life we are called to.
Open our eyes, Lord,
so that we might see the stranger in our midst.
Give us openness to listen to their stories.
Remind us that we just never know when we might come
across Jesus, our friend, our Lord and master.
Open our eyes and our hearts, Lord.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of adoration**

They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us
while he talked with us?’
Lord Jesus, you met with people in so many ways.
Ordinary ways – walking, talking, eating with them.
But also extraordinary – because you were there.
You are an extraordinary God; we worship and adore you.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

*Keep a few moments of silence after each refrain.*

Lord, for the times we hear the Scriptures
and our hearts don’t burn within us:
**be with us, stay with us, forgive us.**
When we don’t recognise Jesus in our midst
because we’re just not looking:
**be with us, stay with us, forgive us.**
When we are too blind to see you in the simple things:
**be with us, stay with us, forgive us.**
When we are too wrapped up in ourselves
to break bread together:
**be with us, stay with us, forgive us.**
When we don’t treat strangers with the respect they are due,
or look the other way:
**be with us, stay with us, forgive us, Lord**.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

Jesus was with the two on the road to Emmaus; working in
their lives, even though they didn’t know it.
Jesus is with us on our road; working in our lives, even when
we don’t feel it.
Lord Jesus, you spoke on that road through the simple action of
breaking the bread.
Speak to us now through your divine forgiveness.
Keep a moment of silence.
We hear you, Lord.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

Lord, as we go out into this new week,
may we recognise Jesus in everyone we meet.
May our whole lives be a beacon of praise and thanksgiving,
pointing to the one we love.
May we take every chance we get,
to talk about what you mean to us and show our love.
As we share with each other we get to know each other better,
and we grow stronger, and you, O God,
are revealed in a multitude of ways.
Thank you, Lord.
**Amen.**

**Focus scripture: Luke 24:13–35**

I spoke last week on the gospel account in John where Doubting Thomas says he can’t believe Jesus has been raised from the dead unless he sees the nail marks in his hands and side.

Today’s passage is again about the struggles with belief about the resurrection and experiencing the risen Lord with us. But it is also about a journey from fear and despair to faith and hope. What are you fearful of? What do you despair about? How can you find faith and hope?

In Luke 24 we have two disciples – Cleopas and perhaps his wife – who are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, talking over the events of the preceding days and the puzzling story of Mary Magdalene’s encounter with Jesus in the garden. They are sad, disappointed, and confused. They had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah, come to bring political deliverance for Israel.

As they walk along, Jesus comes near them, but they do not recognize him. He asks about their conversation, and they tell him the story of the previous week in Jerusalem. Jesus unpacks for them the Hebrew Scriptures – stories of Moses and the prophets that tell how the Messiah must suffer in order to bring about God’s plan for salvation.

When they reach Emmaus, the two urge Jesus to stay with them because it is almost evening. Jesus has a meal with them. Though he is the guest, he takes the role of host – blessing and breaking the bread, and giving it to them. The table is the place where these two disciples came to know Jesus more deeply. Jesus vanishes, and the two return to Jerusalem to share their joy with the others.

They have made a journey from fear and despair to faith and hope. What has helped them in that journey?

First thing is they had someone come alongside them.

I spoke last week about the importance of community and being part of a supportive network of friends. There is a billion pound industry out there telling you to stay at home and watch the latest from Netflix or go on holiday by yourselves and just seek pleasure – no strings attached enjoyment. Being part of a committed community is costly. You will rub up people the wrong way, you will have disagreements and fall outs, you will have the hard work of making a contribution to the group, spending time with others. Its the price of community. But hopefully the price is worth paying because there is someone alongside you. You are not on your own. Together you can support each other: laugh and cry together.

These two disciples, Cleopas and his partner, are depressed, downcast and despondent. Things change when a stranger comes alongside them.

During the pandemic times were difficult times of isolation and social distancing. I did a funeral this week of one of our dear members who had died of Covid 19. Only five guests were allowed to gather at the crematorium we all had to keep our distance when the natural instinct is to physically console each other with handshakes and hugs at this time of sad loss. Someone’s physical presence had been removed from us and the least we wanted to do was come alongside those who grieve.

I know for many of you living alone is difficult.

During the pandemic we had to find new ways of relating and supporting each other and finding ways of being supported. Now its over I hope we can still look out for each other.

The Emmaus story of course is focused on the companionship of Jesus and the difference of it makes when Jesus walks alongside us.

In the King James Version of the Bible, the invitation of the two travellers for Jesus to stay with them for the evening reads, "Abide with me; for it is toward evening and the day is far spent,” words which were the inspiration for that beloved hymn, "Abide with me/Fast falls the eventide." The hymn was written by Henry Francis Lyte, for 25 years the vicar of the parish at Devonshire, England. He was 54 years old, broken in health and saddened by dissensions in his congregation. On Sunday, September 4, 1847 he preached his farewell sermon and went home to rest. After tea in the afternoon, he retired to his study. In an hour or two, he rejoined his family, holding in his hand the manuscript of his immortal hymn.

Despite what most think, Lyte's "eventide" has nothing to do with the end of the natural day but rather the end of life. "Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day/Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away." The words are about the faith that faces life and death fearlessly and triumphantly in the light of the cross and the empty tomb....East of Easter. Thus Lyte could conclude, "Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee/In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me." Lyte died three months later.

If we have known the abiding presence of Jesus we will have transformed lives. When the truth of the gospel grabs you, your eyes are opened to see God’s love and God’s ways. Your heart burns. When we hear something that is true and right, we feel it deep down - there is a kind of bodily resonance that occurs. We even respond with the words, “that really moved me.” Luke here in this passage refers to this as heart burn:

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

Obviously we don’t have the physical presence of Jesus with us now. Christians believe we have the spiritual presence of Jesus with us. How do we know the spiritual presence? How does Christ abide with us today?

When Jesus drew near Cleopas and his partner walking on the road to Emmaus, they were despondent and downcast. They called Jesus only a prophet not the Messiah, because whilst they had followed him they saw him get crucified and therefore thought he was not who he said he was – a failed messiah, their hopes dashed.

Jesus said, ‘how foolish you are’. Usually in the bible when people are called fools it has to do with them denying there is a God or being sceptical that God is at work for good in the world and they lose hope. (e.g. Ps 14.1; Luke 12.20)

Jesus explains from the scriptures God’s plan and turns their attitudes and mood around.

Prayer is the key. Prayer is being still and centring on the presence of Christ. We have done a couple of sessions of the Paryer course based on Pete Greig’s book *How to Pray: a simple guide for normal people*.

In the book Pete Grieg describes how once a dark cloud of despair descended upon him one morning when he became inexplicably and overwhelmingly fearful about the future. I know many of you may be in that position, worried about your jobs or your career prospects as a result of this crisis.

Pete said that he realised that although this feeling was very powerful it may not be true. He reached for his Bible and found Jeremiah 29.11 and began to read it.

***11****For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.****12****Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.****13****You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart*

Instead of just reading this verse and thinking ‘how nice’, he felt challenged to take this promise seriously and apply it to his situation.

‘I choose to believe that the Lord has a plan for my life and that he’s in charge! I refuse to panic. I’m not going to be afraid. I reject the lie that I’m continually missing out, that everyone else is moving ahead. That I’m getting left behind.’

His mind turned to Romans 8.1

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,*

‘Get off my back Satan!’ he cried. ‘I can see what you’re trying to do and Im not giving in. Stop accusing me. Stop lying to me. I’m seated in the heavenly realms with Christ. He’s on my side. I’m not going to feel guilty or ashamed. I’m clothed in the righteousness of of Christ. Get lost!’

He found his mood changing as a result of this prayerful resistance. One of the reasons to spend time regularly in scripture is to sharpen the sword as they say – St Paul described the word of God as the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6.14). When God speaks to you through his word it’s not just to bring solace to your soul and light to your path but to arm you with the truth you desperately need for the fight of your life.[[1]](#endnote-1)

It’s easy to forget how much control we actually have over our minds. The 20th-century preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, *“Have you realised that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself*?” **[[2]](#endnote-2)** Our tendency is to let our minds run where they want with a constant stream of thoughts. But Lloyd-Jones points out that the psalmist’s response was usually to talk back, to refuse to allow his “self” to dictate his thought life. Three times, in Psalms 42 and 43, he asks himself, “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?” Then instructs himself: “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.”

Talking to yourself isn’t a sign of madness, it’s a sign of wisdom. You get to choose, in lockdown or in liberty, in coronavirus or in radiant good health, whether to be discontented with your lot, or whether to trust in, lean on and praise your Saviour and your God. Which will you choose today?

Which narrative will you choose?

Imprisoning journalists and opposition spokespeople is a time-honoured way for the Russian regime to fragment loyalties and insist its citizens define themselves in relation to the state. [Vladimir Kara Murza’s](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-65297003) and [Evan Gershkovich’s](https://www.youtube.com/watch) families and fellow activists, picturing the prison famous for KGB interrogation, might well be stopped in their tracks with sadness and worry, weighing up whether to carry on expressing their opinions. The state wants control of the narrative.

We might give thanks that we live in a political culture where our leaders do face scrutiny with the [SNP](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/analysis-snp-crisis-feels-on-the-verge-of-being-terminal-4106925) and [Prime Minister Sunak](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/rishi-sunak-koru-kids-wife-budget-b2321580.html) being investigated over financial affairs. This takes the edge off any fear we might have of the powers that be.

But, for all our freedom, the deeply embarrassing pay disputes among professions arise essentially because we the electorate have accepted the false narrative offered by both of the largest political parties that we can have splendid services without paying for them.

Jesus left the broken bread on the table. Slipping away, that was the evidence they had really seen what they had seen. It was not the only evidence. Their hearts had been burning within them as Jesus expounded the long Biblical story of God showing humanity how God is with us reached its climax in his resurrection.

Luke, the writer of this gospel, first encountered the Christian way in the church he describes in Acts. This community that broke bread and lived with an uncanny lack of fear of Rome drew him in. Then he used his literary talent to synthesize the memories and stories of Jesus that tumbled around. He gave us Luke-Acts.

The Gospel is shaped in order to make sense of the community he discovered and became a part of. It builds up to a Eucharistic climax – bread is broken.

In turn, the community he was drawn into only makes sense if Jesus rose from the dead. It is helpful to add one more verse to the Acts reading, summarising the church Luke joined and then wrote for. Their three habits are study of the apostles’ teaching, breaking bread and praying for the world.

There were plenty of reasons for people to stand still looking sad; plenty of reasons for networks to fragment. The empire, built on power, force and might had crucified Jesus the preacher of non violence and love for God and neighbour. The empire seems to have won.

But from locked room to public square something energising has happened. The resurrection has happened.

Recognizing Jesus energizes the two disciples, and they hurry back to re-join the fellowship. Delightfully, their hope is corroborated by the others who share their hope before they can get their words out.

In the equally threatening world today, the three simple disciplines will keep us hopeful and generous:

Firstly, the apostle’s teaching/opening the scriptures about how the world ticks is more authoritative than any earthly regime or powerful empire that tries to capture the narrative – just make sure who captures your attention – which is why the Bible is a dangerous book and the rest of the world is out to discredit it.;

Secondly - the subversive breaking of bread to remember Jesus keeps reasserting our inter-dependence when so much would propel us apart and that God provides and works for justice in the world;

Thirdly we are called to pray generously for all who would harm, all who would lead, all who seek to control the narrative and all who hang their heads in despair.

Cleopas and his friend shifted from scarcity to abundance of hope, from fear and despair to faith – hearts burning, eyes opened to God’s reality, all because of that broken bread. It's still on the table today.

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord Jesus, we come in stillness to seek you. We pause now to review in our minds the week that has passed. As we do so, we ask you to show us where you were present. Perhaps we didn’t notice you at the time, but can see you now as we remember.

*Say to those present, giving time for quiet thought/prayer after each question:*

* *What significant events happened to me this week? Where was God in those moments?*
* *Where did I go? Where was God in those places?*
* *Who did I meet? Where was God in those encounters?*

Lord, we rejoice that you were with us every step of the way, even if we couldn’t see you. You were there in moments of pain and sorrow as well as deep joy and fun. We thank you that you are always present, whatever our circumstances, whether we can feel your presence or not. As we go into a new week, help us to look more closely for your presence.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
**and open our eyes to see your presence.**

Lord Jesus, you are with each of us in all the tiny details of our lives. You are also there in the important moments: We bring to you now any upcoming important moments for our community this week… any weddings/funerals/baptisms/anything else in the local community…. Lord, we ask that those who will be at these events/in these places will have a real sense of your love and care.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
**and open our eyes to see your presence.**

Lord, you are also there in our locality and you are there in the big events in the world. We bring to you now the places and people who have made the headlines this week. We lift the nation of Sudan to you. And people and places in the USA where there have been gun crimes again this week. We continue to remember Ukraine, Yemen, Syria, Turkey and Afghanistan, you see these places even when they are out of the news.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
**and open our eyes to see your presence.**

Lord, we pray for those who need a sign of your presence with them this week. We lift to you our young people back at school and all those who are preparing for exams. We pray for pupils, students and teachers in this very busy term.

We pray for those who are sick in body, mind or spirit. We ask for your comforting presence to aid them in their pain. We pray for patience and courage for all those who look after them. We pray for the lonely, isolated and the housebound. For all who are carers, paid or unpaid; known or unknown. And we pray for those who are sorrowful today. Help them to know that your resurrection means that there is hope for the future.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
**and open our eyes to see your presence.**

Lord, we turn now to the week ahead of us. You are already going before us, and we thank you that you are preparing our way. Show us how to be Christ-bringers wherever we go so that others will see your reality through us. We commit the new week to you, asking that you help us see you at every turn. Forgive us when we ignore the signs and guide us forward into all the new wonders that will greet us in the resurrection hope you have given us.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
**and open our eyes to see your presence.**

And lead us ever onwards into your light. **Amen.**

A sending out prayer

Lord Jesus,
as you walked on the road to Emmaus,
walk with us on the roads we travel.
Help us to know your presence with us,
and to be your presence to others.
And, at the end of the day,
may we all enjoy your feast.
Amen.

* Are the any ugly or destructive behaviours or assumptions that have been normalised in our contemporary culture?
* What are the things that propel us apart and discourage close community?
* Cleopas mentions the women's testimony that was dismissed as ‘idle tales’ in Luke 24:11 but doubt is creeping in. Whose voices today, dismissed as foolish, might turn out to be the ones we should have listened to all along?

In all you have discussed, conclude by identifying where the hope is.

*Sermon with notes from The Revd David Warbrick is Vicar of All Saints Kings Heath in the Anglican Diocese of Birmingham, where he takes preaching, breaking bread and prayer seriously, but likes his comforts, and fears he would not have the courage to go to prison for the gospel.*

* **Ceri Richards’ sketch of**[**‘The supper at Emmaus’**](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/life-and-faith/the-methodist-modern-art-collection/index-of-works/the-supper-at-emmaus-ceri-richards/)**is included in the Methodist Collection of ModernArt. You can’t miss the big hands and feet of its three figures, but the picture’s bold colours are its most striking feature. The background is bright blue. A broad yellow stripe joins top to bottom. Another links left and right to form the tabletop around which the figures sit. These glorious yellows make the sign of the cross. The figure blessing the two companions is disappearing into the upright, as if to join heaven and earth, the risen Christ with those who share the simplicity of the meal he hosts.**

**What is it?**

An activity to reveal the picture as we are built up in faith piece by piece.

**You will need**: a picture, A3 or larger, completely covered in sticky notes. Make the image relate to, but not be of, today’s Gospel story; it could be biblical (e.g. the last supper), or contemporary (broken bread, a Eucharist in action, a household meal).

* Invite volunteers to come and remove a sticky note and try to guess what the picture is. Continue removing notes one at a time and trying to guess the picture. Encourage people to describe what they can see in the picture. After a while, or as time runs out, you can open up the guessing to all present.
* Once the image has been identified, ask how it might relate to today’s Gospel story or theme. But also ask how easy/difficult it was to work it out. Sometimes in our journeys of life and faith, we don’t see the whole picture straight away, rather it builds up piece by piece. Ask if anyone has any examples they are willing to share. W E S A

**A simple worship activity**

Prayerfully link the cross, the Emmaus story, and us.

**You will need**: A5 sheets of paper with small squares or dots, one each; pencils.

* Invite people to use the grid on their paper to draw a cross on the paper, centrally and not too small.
* Use the hymn ‘[On the day of resurrection](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Singing_the_Faith_Presentation_Edition/NzapAwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=on+the+day+of+resurrection+michael+peterson&pg=PA307-IA1&printsec=frontcover)’ (STF 307 ), based on the Emmaus story, as part of a meditation on today’s theme. The instructions are:

Invite people to start with a finger touching the centre of the cross; read verse one of the hymn.
**Pray ‘Come to us, Lord Jesus, and help us to know you more.’**

Read verse two, tracing your finger to the top of the cross and keeping it there.
**Pray ‘Walk with us, Lord Jesus, and help us, especially when things don’t seem to make sense.’**

Read verse three, tracing your finger down to the bottom of the cross and keeping it there.
**Pray ‘Speak to us, Lord, and help us to know more about you.’**

Read verse four, tracing your finger back to the centre of the cross.
**Pray ‘Jesus, stay with us and help us to find time to spend with you.’**

Read verse five, tracing your finger out to the right.
**Pray ‘Jesus, help us to recognise you in our worship and out in the world.’**

Read verse six, tracing your finger across through the middle and over to the left.
**Pray ‘Jesus, we pray that others may see you in and through us.’**

Trace your finger back to the centre.
Pray ‘**Amen**.’ E S

* The Emmaus Road story is like a dot-to-dot puzzle where joining the dots reveals the picture. The disciples draw on their past and recent experiences. They draw on their knowledge of Scripture. They add in their expectations of Jesus based on that experience and knowledge. They draw on the interpretation of Scripture offered by the stranger. They draw on their culture to offer hospitality –and that decision proves to be key! But the final piece eludes them until Jesus takes and breaks bread. Then the picture is complete. They see the risen Christ. Do we see a complete picture or are there pieces still covered to us?
* How do we work things out? Do we follow instructions written by someone else? Do we accept help from someone else who talks us through or shows us what to do? Do we mull things over ourselves? Do we talk things over with others? Do we go with our ‘gut instinct’? Do we look for a sign? The disciples used a range of these to try to make sense of what was happening, and finally, the penny drops! Jesus is risen, they are encouraged and ready to move on in their journey with Christ. What might we do to help the penny drop for us?

**Your journey** 15 mins W E

Share your journey and when you have encountered Jesus

**You will need**: paper and pens.

* Talk about the moment of revelation in the story. Invite the young people to think about when they have learnt something new about Jesus.
* Invite everyone to draw a road to represent their life (it might be straight and easy or long and winding), and write or draw something at each stage where Jesus has met them.
* Ask: What did Jesus show you at each of these points? Which parts of this story connect with you today?
1. Pete Greig, How to Pray, Hodder, 2019, p186-87 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/5-ways-to-fight-for-contentment-during-lockdown> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)