



Rev Helen Jacobi

The Road

Year A Easter 3

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Luke 24:13-35

23 April 2023

The story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is, I think, my favourite Bible passage.

I love to wonder about Cleopas and his unnamed companion – women tend not to be named in the Bible so maybe she is Cleopas' wife or daughter.

I love to imagine their conversation, a mixture of grief and also hope as they talk about the strange tale of the women and angels and Jesus being alive.

I love the mystery of the stranger who appears and walks with them, listening, and then explaining the scriptures to them.

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

They are engaging with their hearts more than their heads.

But they still don't recognize him.

The day draws to a close and Cleopas and his companion arrive home, or at their destination and so invites the stranger to stay – an absolute obligation in the culture of the time.¹

¹ Kenneth Bailey [Through Peasant Eyes](#) p108

Then I love the account of the meal “When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them” You might recognise there the actions of the eucharist, of our communion service, where we take the bread, bless it, break it and share it.

The words are the same ones that the writer of this gospel will use of Jesus at the Last Supper (22:19) and the feeding of the 5000 (9:16).

“He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them”

It is then that Cleopas and the companion recognise Jesus.

Both parts of our liturgy are found in this story – the word and the sacrament– the word - the readings and the sermon and the prayers; then the sacrament – the bread and wine of the eucharist.

As Anglicans we are people of the word and the sacrament – equally.

Each is in balance in our liturgy and in our lives.

Last time we read this passage together we were in lockdown in 2020 and I said then this passage was starting to make me miss the eucharist but nonetheless we could use our worship time to focus on the word.

It is good to be back in balance with both.

Of course the bread and wine is not the only sacrament in our lives.

The word sacrament simple means a sign – a sign of God’s presence with us.

So the bread and wine are signs of Jesus; water is the sign of baptism.

Next week we will experience the sacrament of confirmation.

The laying on of hands on the head of the candidate by the bishop is a sign of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

And we can go wider than the “official” sacraments of the church One writer, Claudio Carvalhaes says this:

The whole universe can be a sacrament. Everyday every person will be grateful for something.

One day we will listen to the birds as a sacrament and we will sing back to them in gratitude.

Another day we will tell a story to a child either in our house or online to somebody else and count this storytelling as a sacrament.

Another we will eat and say to the earth how grateful we are for our bountiful meals and save some for the hungry.

Another we might celebrate the rain we receive as God's sacrament.

If there is no rain, our shower will be a sacrament, our washing of the dishes will be a sacrament of who we are.

On the seventh day we gather together, count the thousand sacraments we experienced and tell each other how our gathering can be enriched by so many other sacraments, keeping our hearts positive all week long!²

Like the travellers on the road to Emmaus we bring our lives, our worries, our concerns to the table, to the gathering.

Next week our 5 candidates for confirmation will bring their whole lives, their whole selves, and we will present them to the bishop and say – these people have our support to take their next step in faith.

Please confirm the presence of the Holy Spirit already within them.

And the bishop will gladly agree.

At our retreat day on Saturday we will take a look at the promises the candidates will make – can we remember making them at our own confirmation?

Might we want to make them again or for the first time in the future?

We had a session with the group and their sponsors a few weeks ago and looked at the promises and unpacked some of the layers behind each one; it was a rich discussion.

Like the travellers on the road to Emmaus we discuss and debate and wonder and seek to grow and learn.

² adapted <https://reimaginingworship.com/being-church-as-we-live-with-covid19-challenges-and-demands-claudio-carvalhoaes/?fbclid=IwAR3bevHaHmFiNJuQWJiP7q2vlvaMB9Q4EwQzS5Z6Gfx3gph3S9Hb-KxXEUC>

We do that by offering hospitality, being open to the stranger who walks alongside, allowing our hearts to burn with passion.

As a parish community you are about to take a new turn in the road as I step down as your vicar in two weeks time.

You will be taking some time to walk together and listen carefully to each other and to the Spirit moving amongst you.

Some people love change, others not so much!

But transitions are good when they unsettle you just enough to see new opportunities or angles or approaches.

So take the time to look at each other afresh, to listen with a different ear, to look at the city around us and to discern what the opportunities for service might be.

I will be going through my own massive transition as I mourn the recent death of my mother, welcome our twin grandchildren, and move cities.

I love change but that is a big list even for me.

So I will be taking the time to listen to the Spirit and I will be praying for you in your listening and discernment.

Wherever each of us finds ourselves we will be able to find Jesus in the breaking of the bread like the companions on the road to Emmaus.

Or as we will read next week from the Book of Acts - in “the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, the breaking of the bread and the prayers” (2:42).

And we will look for signs of God’s presence around us and within us, and we will find them in abundance.