

Easter III 26th April 2020

Readings: Acts 2:14a, 36-41

1 Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

Reflection:

'Lord, I am hurting. I feel like a tree with its roots laid bare (so writes Joy Cowley)what I need, Lord, is a friend. Choose my friend carefully. Please, no-one who's going to tell me how to put my life straight, no amateur analyst or teacher, no preacher, no well-meaning person who is going to "should" all over me....

My friend will already know that pain is important in journey and must be travelled through. My friend will stay beside me and hold my hand while I make my own discoveries.'

It hurts to have to watch another's pain; it hurts even more to share in it. And yet this is what Jesus does as he meets the two disciples on the Emmaus road. Cleopas and his friend are utterly despondent – confused, numb, grieving, hopeless, despairing – as they walk into the setting sun on their seven-mile journey from Jerusalem. It is the third day after Jesus' cruel death, and all their hopes and dreams, all they have invested in the One they believed was Messiah, has seemingly come to nothing - shattered. There isn't even a body for them to grieve over.

As they trudge along the road to Emmaus, Jesus draws near, walks alongside them and asks what they are discussing. And then he simply listens; listens as Cleopas pours out the story, incredulous that the apparent 'stranger' has not heard of all that has happened in Jerusalem. We can hear the disciple's despondency as he says: *'We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel'*. The dashing of hopes and dreams, sudden loss and grief, can bring us to a standstill. (We know that only too well at this moment in time – individually, in our families and communities, our nation and our world. Covid-19 has brought many to an emotional, social and economic standstill.)

And yet, as Jesus walks alongside the two on the Emmaus Road, inviting them to tell their story, and hearing their outpouring of grief, he honours and shares their pain. Only *after* this, does he respond. I wonder how Jesus felt as he listened. Did he feel deep compassion for them in their despair? Or would he have been frustrated? After all that he had shared prior to his death - of what was to come - realising how blinded they were to the reality of his living presence? It must have seemed as if his three years of journeying, teaching and discipling had all been in vain.

Perhaps *you've* had the experience of listening to a friend or family member deep in despair, seeing no light ahead of them. Perhaps you've been able to see a different perspective – or the bigger picture - and had to bite your tongue for awhile, allowing them to discover the light for themselves. I know for myself, if I haven't been able to own and express my feelings, whether sadness, or anger, or despair, I can't possibly move to a place of listening and hearing anyone else's perspective. And if someone actually recognises and acknowledges my feelings, I'm then much more ready to move to a place of healing and deeper insight.

So Jesus – having drawn alongside the two, having questioned and listened – *then* begins to open the scriptures to them. He offers them the 'bigger picture' in which both his *and* their own story lives. We read later, that their hearts were *burning* within them, as Jesus talked with them on the road. Although they didn't recognise him as he spoke, something was beginning to happen within them – a spark was flickering into life - prompting them to invite this 'stranger' to stay with them as the day drew to a close. Yet, Jesus doesn't force himself on the two, but leaves *them* to respond to *him*. (That's what good friends do. They listen carefully, hear our feelings and perhaps – when appropriate - remind us of the bigger picture in which *our* story sits.)

Then Jesus - at the table with the two disciples - during a simple, ordinary, shared meal, takes bread, blesses and breaks it, and gives it to them. There is a flash of recognition, their hearts, minds and eyes now opened to the reality of Jesus' living presence – and then he is gone.

When did you last experience it.....that flash of recognition...the Christ in your midst? Perhaps out on a daily walk, receiving the warm smile of a stranger or hearing from a long-lost friend or estranged relative during lockdown? Perhaps a special ANZAC Day encounter?

For me it was just last Friday afternoon, listening to a neighbour's very personal and heart-rending wartime story– hearing Jim's pain (not his real name), his hurt, anger, disgust, grief, shame...and then his commitment to helping others over the ensuing fifty-plus years - especially young people and their families – to live in fullness of life. It was such a privilege to hear Jim's story, to listen carefully and to share how it was for him now, in the context of his and his family's life story *and* on the eve of ANZAC Day. As I walked the road of haunting memories and suffering with Jim, I knew that *I* was standing on Holy Ground. And my own heart was burning within me as I prayerfully reflected on his story throughout Friday evening and ANZAC Day.

Our Lord is as close as a footstep, drawing alongside us in our pain, entering our darkness, sharing our journey, listening to our fears, reminding us of our place in ***His*** story and shining the burning light of his risen presence into our hearts. Can we recognise him in the ordinariness of our lives? Can we hear him in our Covid-19-midst? And can *we* offer a Christ-like presence to one another as we risk entering each others' pain?

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

In the name of God.....

Helen Roud