

Sermon preached 30th April 2017 based on Luke 24.13-35

The walk to Emmaus

May I speak in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This sermon being my last was going to be very long and very theological.

All the interpretation of the story according to all the study books I have.

But don't worry – it's not. I couldn't possibly disappoint Simon and all of you who have said how much you enjoy my stories.

So – this is the story of the 2 disciples who were returning home to Emmaus after the momentous events of that Passover.

Oh hello - I'm El, and a number of years ago, when my friend Cleopas and I - both disciples of Jesus Christ, went with other friends from our village of Emmaus on the 7 mile walk to Jerusalem.

As was our custom we went there every year at the time of the Passover.

We were lucky to live so near. We didn't have to worry about accommodation – just the long walk – but along with friends we walked and talked and joked and sang.

As we approached the city we could hear the crowds. There seemed to be even more people than usual, maybe they too had heard that Jesus would be there this year. We got to the city gates and all seemed to go quiet.

'What's happening?' I asked. 'They've put Jesus on trial in front of Pilate' was the reply. The people in the crowd were murmuring. Then others came among us inciting the crowd to demand that Jesus be crucified. We saw Pilate stand. He shouted that he could release Jesus or the brigand Barabbas – what did they want?

This was when the excited crowd cried for Jesus to be crucified.

He was handed a huge cross and the Roman soldiers fought a way through the crowd and headed for Golgotha. Many a time we'd seen criminals suffering the agonising death that crucifixion was. We certainly hadn't expected that Jesus's longed for life and ministry would end like that. We followed the crowd –then the sounds of nails being knocked into wood echoed above the crowd. Somehow the crowd parted and I was able to see him – he looked so dignified despite their having taken his clothes. He was praying as though he knew that this was what he'd been born for – that his Father in heaven would look after him.

We left then – couldn't bear any more – but reassured by having seen him again – we thought for the last time. But that was not be. Frightened by the darkness that had descended over the city, we were very unhappy, but resolved to stay in the city to see what happened.

We stayed with other the disciples that night and the next day was long and we all felt bereft, lonely, though we had each other, Jesus was no longer with us.

On the third day we had to go home to Emmaus., and as we walked – hungry and tired - a stranger joined us on our journey – walking along side us.

He asked 'what are you talking about?'

'Do you not know all that has happened in Jerusalem?'

'That they crucified Jesus of Nazareth – who we thought was going to save us – and all this took place 3 days ago and we don't know what's happened to his body. Some of our friends went to the tomb where they had laid him – and they came back with a tale about angels who said that he was alive – but they didn't see him'

Our companion was astonished that we did not remember all that the prophets of old had said about the Messiah – how they had forecast his suffering and death.

The man would have carried on walking but we urged him to stay with us, the day was nearly over and it wasn't safe to be out after dark. We thought nothing more could happen to amaze us – but while seated at the table the man picked up some bread - and - having blessed the bread he broke it – and we watched him do this – and we looked at each other in astonishment.

We had seen those hands already – a couple of years before – when we were seated on a Galilean hillside – and Jesus had blessed the 5 loaves and fed all 5,000 of us – and baskets of crumbs left over. And - at that our eyes were opened. As we realised it was Jesus Christ, who had walked with us, who was there at table with us, he vanished.

We forgot about fear of the dark and put on again our cloaks and sandals and hastened back to Jerusalem to share the news with the disciples. They already knew that the Lord had risen because he'd been seen by Simon. Such joy was shared by all his followers.

We are asked many times about the experience of travelling along the road to Emmaus with our companion Jesus – and we never tire of sharing it with all who ask. Cleopas and I are old now but in our memories it's as though it only happened recently, and we

especially re-live it each year at the time of the Passover festival, never ceasing to be amazed that Jesus Christ appeared to us – and spoke to us – and blessed our bread. And most importantly – made sense of all that had previously dismayed us. I wish you all blessings and may you have the joy of Christ in your lives just as we have.

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Writing this has made me think about the many times that Jesus Christ has walked alongside me – sometimes known – often not.

After a childhood of irregular church going and teenage years of worshiping with mum at St Peter's Codsall Wood, I got married and - sadly - I missed a few years, but came back to church in early 1980 – mostly because our son Phillip joined Bilbrook Cubs.

In those days the leader encouraged the cubs to attend Church Parade and I didn't want to take Phillip and leave him at the door – so started going to church again – more regularly than just Church parade.

Later that year I was diagnosed with a serious illness – no not cancer. For the next 2 years Jesus was alongside me every day, helping me to cope. In January 82, while you all suffered that massive snow fall, I was safely tucked up in the Royal hospital in the care of one of the best bowel surgeons in the country. By the time I was discharged, well on the road to recovery, the snow was just slush in the gutters.

My recovery went well and I felt enormous gratitude to God for my return to a normal life. I wanted to serve God and the church and in November 1987 became a Lay Reader as we were called then. After many years as Reader at Holy Cross - at Christmas 2010 I left to join Bill and the rest of you here at St Nick's. I was licensed as a Reader in Codsall Parish in July 2011 and it's been a real joy to be part of the ministry team. It was a special pleasure to be welcomed at St. Peter's as a worship leader and preacher - meeting people I'd known much earlier in life. I would like to thank Simon and the ministry team and the many others who have given me support and encouragement during my time at St Nicholas. And for those who've enjoyed my stories I'm planning to write some for the Parish Magazine in a few months' time.