

Bible Reading: Luke 24v13-35 The Road to Emmaus

Walking, Listening, Talking and Eating with Jesus ...and other people

Introduction

(!) Its nearly that time of year again isn't it!

What am I talking about?

-Spring has sprung perhaps and it certainly has?

-Am I referring to the new school term?

-Or that it is time to be booking your summer holiday?

Yes all these are true.....but I'm thinking of something far more important than all of these things....yes it's that time of year again for our AGM our Annual General Meeting.....and our APCM our Annual Parochial Church Meeting...APCM and AGM because actually we have two meetings at the same time....one to vote in our church officials and the other is the AGM of the PCC

That means for Rectors and Wardens it's time to dust off our guidance books on how everything needs to be done and our 3 bibles to get everything done properly are these:

-The ABC of the PCC

-The Book of Practical Church Management

-and The Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors

There is quite a lot of procedure and forms to get right for an AGM and APCM and these books are very helpful and a great read.....if you have nothing else to read!!

Pause

But what are our AGM and APCM meetings for?

As I mentioned.....we vote in our wardens, PCC members and Deanery Synod members who represent you and we receive and approve our annual report and financial accounts for the past year.....and these are important things in the life of our church as we seek to be well organised and accountable to you the congregation

But also in addition, if not more importantly, it is an opportunity for us to come together as a church family

.....to **Look Back** to what we can give thanks to God for

.....and to **Look Forward** to where God is calling us to go in the year ahead

Pause

Looking Back

I'll come onto my thoughts for looking forward in a moment.....but first how should we look back on the year that has passed? I wonder how do you think it has gone for us as a church?

If you can come to the AGM/APCM at 4pm this afternoon and read our annual report there is lots will see there of what has happened....and overall I think (that despite the hardship of the last 3 years through Covid, the difficulties of getting things back up and running and our ongoing uncertain times, and yes of course some things that could have been better in hindsight) we do have a lot to give thanks for at St Peter's

-we are as a church back up and running in a normal way which is no small achievement and it is lovely to see everyone back and joining in consistently

-we are seeing new people joining our church family and they are very welcome

-we have been and are growing in our faith through our praying more deeply together, enjoying our worship and serving together in previous and new ways

In terms of activities and groups

....it has been really good see new groups and activities especially with our Families and Children under the leadership of Kate and her team...Teeny Tinies, Garden Gang, Sunday Club and Sunday

Funday...we are seeing some more children on a Sunday but they and their families are around in various groups which is goodand for adults we have started a number of new groups and activities.....a warm space which has now moved to a Wednesday afternoon café here in church and we have a couple of new home groups

In terms of practical things

progress has been made which I am sure many of you have noticeda new hand rail at the front here which for a small thing was a lot of work

...our AV system has been renewed

...our informal service is back in the main church and we have our lovely cross over time coffee

...our organ console and band locations have moved and been improved

...and a lot of behind the scenes work has been done to improve our facilities: the installation of hand dryers and repainting of the Stables Room

Pause

Looking Forward

So looking back.....I do hope you can feel encouraged at all that has happened and is happening despite still being in a time of recovery

But what about looking forward?.....what might be a good vision and next steps for us over the next year?

Pause

Well as well as how we can keep up what we are doing...which is not to be underestimated on the PCC we have various things we are discussing some smaller and some bigger

-first there is getting our clock repaired which as you know has been stuck at 11:55 for a couple of years...it tells the correct time twice a day but it we do need it right all the time....it is taking time, excuse the pun, not because we have been slow but because of the

specialist nature of the repair and trying to raise the funds we need

-second we want to improve our coffee and serving facilities on a Sunday morning as it is getting quiet busy at the back

-third we want to look at what we can do to see more people come into our church and our church used throughout the week...and we want look at how our family and children's groups might meet in here because at the moment there is not enough room to do the activities they would like easily

In summary this means we want to re-imagine how we might use our historic church to be both what it has been but also what it needs to be for now and the future

In the coming weeks you will hear more about this...we do want to consult with you and hear your ideas

Pause

Your PCC and other teams under are working hard on your behalf to do what we can to improve and make our church facilities and activities as effective as they can be and if you have ideas please do let us know

Pause

So our Church life looking back and looking forwards is not about comparison with others....but I think we can be greatly encouraged and proud of all that is happening to be a church that has life in it and many would love to have half of what we have going on

Pause

But is that all that there should be to our vision and plans?

When it comes to vision and plans:

.... it is very easy isn't it to just default to practical matters, visible things and what we see on the outside if you like

....these things are important.....but we also need also to have a vision for our spiritual life..... what is not seen so much and what is happening on the inside of our lives

...we need to be growing Christians in our relationship and friendship with God so that we might be effective on the outside

Pause

(!) Iphone....To use the analogy of a computer or perhaps these days our smart phone or ipad.....what is really most important is not so much the phone itself is it...it doesn't really matter what makeof phone of computer you have these days.....but having the right software and apps that make a difference to our living...if we don't have right and up to date software.....the hardware won't work or be effective

Walking and Eating with Jesus to grow

So.....what might be a good spiritual vision and plan for the year ahead that would grow ourselves and new people into God's family?

Pause

For the year ahead I would like us to have in mind the simple message of our Gospel story this morning.....the famous story of Jesus appearing on the Road to Emmaus.... **To walk, listen, talk**

and eat with Jesus...to walk, talk and eat with Jesus ourselves and to do the same with those around us

It was the way Jesus changed and grew people and it is the way God uses us to change others...

Pause

Walk, listen, talk and eat with Jesus....can you indulge me by saying that with me..... **Walk, listen, talk and eat with Jesus**.....it sounds simple, but it was the way of Jesus and it was powerful and effective to help people move from being lost to being found.....and then to change and to grow

Pause

But what's involved....what do we see from this story of Jesus on the Road to Emmaus?

Walk

Well first walk!.....in Jesus and in his ministry we always see him going ...literally walking to people.....not waiting for them to always to come to him

-He went from heaven to earth

-He went out from the synagogue....the church of the day to people

-He went out from his group of friends to make new ones

*-And even when in a larger group he would focus on the individual
-After then after his death and resurrection he appeared to many
individuals including here on the road to Emmaus*

Pause

These two people on the road to Emmaus....a town about 7 miles to the west of Jerusalem.....were followers in the wider circle of Jesus.....possibly a husband and wife, Cleopas and Mary....and as Jesus has done through his ministry we see Jesus taking the initiative to go to and meet with these two people who were in sorrow and puzzlement about all that had recently happenedand Jesus helped them understand what was going on and to get know him on a personal level as they walked, listening to each other, talked and then ate together

Pause

Walk, Listen, Talk and Eat with Jesus....

In the year ahead I believe Jesus is calling us to allow him to walk more with us in our daily lives.....he is always there through his Holy Spirit.....but will we allow him to walk with us along the way we are going...will we let him close.....will we let him listen and speak and change us? And then of course as we become more like

him...as he rubs off on us....will we do that same with others as he does for us?

Pause

(!) Each of us have our own particular interests don't we

Perhaps it is playing or watching sport of some kind, a team game such as football, or an individual game

Perhaps you like playing or listening to music, maybe classical or popular depending on your taste, or maybe you like a bit of both!

Some of you might like history and culture looking at buildings and places, or art of various kinds.

Some love learning through reading books, magazines or articles or through visiting museums.

Some of us enjoy everyday activities such as gardening, cooking, DIY or just walking the dog.

It is good to have our own special interests through life and we might find a few along the way who like our interests as we like theirs but the one thing we can do with everyone is walk and spend time with people....people we know and new people

Learn to Listen and then Share the Scriptures

So first in the coming year I am going to resolve to make more of a focus of letting Jesus walk with me and to then walk as best as I can with others....but what should we do then.....what do we see in the example of Jesus?.....he listened and then he shared the scriptures

(!) Listening....two of these and one of these...I am not always very good at it.....but as the years go by I think I am getting better...but it is so important isn't it to understand where someone in life is in what they are thinking and feeling so that they know they are understood....Jesus modelled 'listening' perfectly to understand and know the person and then what might be a helpful question to ask or thing to say

In my little prayer book that I am using at the moment it had this very helpful reflection in it this week and I would like to read it to you:

QUOTE

Jesus....he is listening to you and he wants you to know that he understands and knows....and as he has done that for us is calling us to do the same for others

Pause

As Christians.....we are called to be great listeners.....but not to stop there....but also to speak something of the story of God in scripture that will be helpful

Pause

In our Emmaus story the husband and wife are feeling down about all that had recently happened to Jesus

They had thought he was the one to was the last great prophets 'The Messiah'.....God come in person with great teaching, miracles and life.....but now he was dead how could he save his people?....his crucifixion and death had been devastating because, as the people had thought and had hoped at the time, how could he now redeem God's people from slavery like Moses had done in the Exodus?

Pause

What they thought and felt is what we all would have done.....but they had of course been reading their bible in the wrong way...they has been thinking that God would redeem them from suffering rather than through suffering

Pause

(!) When we look at the bible it is easy to read it as just individual verses or stories or books.....we think that it is just about finding the few things that will help us in our actions for God....to help us improve a bit and of course there is a lot of that in the bible...but the bible is mainly not a self help or self improvement book but a book about God and how he can improve us...the bible is about God and the actions he has done for us not what actions we have to do for him

If we look at the bible as a random collection of texts we will never see Christianity as more than some things that we need to find to obey to make our lives a bit better....but rather we need to see the bible as the great story of God to save us:

-from slavery to the promised land

-from the fall in the Garden of Eden to Heaven

-from our lives now to lives in the future

Then we will see the Gospel message....that God in his son Jesus took on all the world's suffering, died under the weight of our sin.....but from his perfect life was raised to begin God's new family and creation into which he invites us

Pause

On that road to Emmaus it is recorded that the Mary and Cleopas said: *“Beginning with Moses and all the prophets he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures.”*

When we walk with people.....and after we have listened....what people are looking for is not a few proof texts to convince them of the truth of Christianity.....but an explanation and truth for the whole of life so that they might be able to see who Jesus is and that in Jesus are all the answers to life

Pause

To grow in God we need to walk, listen and then learn how to read ourselves and share all the scriptures.....the whole bible story to give people the big picture for life and so to see how Jesus answers all their questions

This is why it is so good and so important

-to read the bible for ourselves perhaps with some bible notes each day to help us

-to talk things over with a friend

-to go to a small group to discuss with a few others

-and of course to listen to good bible teaching Sunday by Sunday

Just as we need a good balanced diet to stay physically healthy so we cant just live on The Gospels and few key teaching of Jesus but we need to delve into everything

-from Genesis to Revelation

-we need the OT and NT

-we need The Prophets, Proverbs and the Psalms

and we need both Jesus and St Paul in which we will see the big story of Scripture and we will also then say, as the two on the road did: *“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us and as he opened up the scriptures.”*

Eat with Jesus and others....Love from the heart

Our vision and plan for the year ahead?

-Walking with Jesus and Walking with other with Jesus

-Learning to be listened to by Jesus and letting him Share the Scriptures with us and us doing the same with others

And then finally eat with Jesus and with others

Pause

In the closing part of the Emmaus story we see that what made a final and biggest difference with the Cleopas and Mary was that in eating with Jesus they came **to experience and know Jesus** in that personal way we all need

We need don't we not just to 'know about God' but to 'know him' and that happens when we spend intimate time with Jesus

We want our heads and hearts to burn with what we are coming to know about and who we are coming to know

(!) Eating together is an intensely personal thing...it is one step on from just walking with someone isn't...we need to be saying to people around us regularly "would you like to go to the pub for a drink or come round for a coffee or come to Sunday lunch"....and when that happens we experience life within ourselves and with other people

Pause

Jesus, as you have heard me say before....and I think it is a pretty good summary of the life of Jesus....he got into trouble for not doing religious things enough and not going to church with the right kind of people but instead spent most of his time with the wrong kind of people in the wrong kind of places.....and we should make our aim in the year ahead to be what people said of Jesus: "³⁴ ***The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'*** ³⁵ ***But wisdom is proved right by all her children.***"

Wisdom....it is found in a God who walks out with people, listens, shares the story of God and eats with people

Pause

The story of Jesus eating with these two people has a lot of spiritual significance and I think would be a great vision for us as church family in the year ahead and fits with actually what we all love to do which is to spend time walking, listening, eating and drinking with other people....it is what life is all about and we see in this Emmaus meal lots of other meals in the bible

-it has a parallel with the first meal that ever happened when Adam and Eve fell

-it has a parallel with all the meals that Jesus ate with different people

-and it has a parallel with of course the last supper pointing to what he was going to do on the cross

In summary.....when we spend quality time with Jesus and other people.....eyes are opened to who God is: “He took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them; then their eyes were opened and they recognised him.”

In sharing communion and eating together it is something spiritual and real that we do and where we come to know Jesus and realise for ourself that death has been defeated and we will live forever

Pause

Christians....and as we believe in C of E it is true that as we come in faith to communion in community with each other.....we experience nothing less than the real presence of Jesus by the Holy Spirit as we hold out our hands and receive from Jesus

But communion in the early church.....it was most often done in the context of wider eating together so that it would be a real communal meal.....we can't have lunch every Sunday as well as communion as we have had recently...but my hope in the year ahead is that we will actually eat much more together, get to know each other and new people so that we may grow in our knowing of God and each other and help others to know God

Conclusion

So to come to a close....what is the most important part of our vision for the year ahead?

Can I encourage you as I do myself:

-to let Jesus Walk with You

-to Listen to you

-to Share the whole story of Scripture with you

-and to eat with you...let his presence be with you as you come to communion and at other times

...and then your eyes will be opened and you will recognise Jesus
...and your heart will burn within you
....and as we do the same with those around us Jesus will meet
and help them and his family our church family will grow

Amen

