

## NAURC worship together 26<sup>th</sup> April 2020

The third Sunday of Easter

Isaiah 53 & Luke 24: 13-35

Sermon by Revd John Potter

- > “We had hoped” - the words of Cleopas and the other disciple spoken to the unrecognised travelling companion on the road to Emmaus.
- > How often have we said those exact words, or something similar, ourselves. There is that sense of expectations that came to nothing, of reality turning out to be sadly different from our expectations.
- > In some small way, those words give vent to a sense of frustration of having to stay at home, or just getting out locally, in the lovely sunny weather of the past couple of weeks. ‘We had hoped’ – to go to the coast ..... etc. There’s that sense of frustration - of being let down even? I suspect we can empathise with the disciples.
- > Let’s get back to the scripture for the moment though, and return to the road to Emmaus. From the text comes a feeling of deep sadness mixed with confusion from Cleopas and his companion – not what we expect from Easter Day – but this event occurred on that Sunday evening.
- > It was just a week ago for the disciples when all their hopes and expectations rose high as Jesus was given a hero’s welcome as he arrived in Jerusalem. Think back a few weeks to the talk I shared with you on Palm Sunday with a mini Bible study on Psalm 118.
- > That great processional song that put into words the hopes that the Israelite people had of the coming saviour:

<sup>21</sup> I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.

<sup>22</sup> The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the chief cornerstone.

<sup>23</sup> This is the Lord’s doing;  
it is marvellous in our eyes.

<sup>24</sup> This is the day that the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it. [\[d\]](#)

<sup>25</sup> Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!  
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

<sup>26</sup> Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. [\[d\]](#)  
We bless you from the house of the Lord.

<sup>27</sup> The Lord is God,  
and he has given us light.

- > Those were the hopes – but now - now it had been three days since the person who carried all those hopes had been crucified – and that was the end of that – or was it?
  - > But they couldn't even get closure on this awful episode as the women of the group had suddenly arrived early that morning with what scripture tells us was “astounding” news - that the body of Jesus had gone and angels had told them he was alive.
  - > A dictionary describes the word “astounded” as “overwhelmed with amazement” or “shocked with wonder or surprise”. Other translations of the Bible have, instead of ‘astounded’, amazed or shocked. *The Message* says the news “completely confused us”.
  - > These two disciples were really struggling to get to grips with what had happened. It's in line with the initial reaction of all the disciples when the women first told them about the missing body and the news from the angels recorded earlier in Luke 24 (10&11)
- “it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”
- > Cleopas and his companion were grieving, their hopes were dashed, and now they were confused too – they needed to talk though what had been going on to in an attempt to sort it all out – and this man walking with them seemed to know just what to say.
  - > ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ <sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” (Lk 24)
  - > There are plenty of scripture passage to choose from as examples of what the mystery man may have used, but Isaiah 53 seems to fit the bill exactly for me. I'd recommend you read the entire chapter if you have time, but I edited it down to the bare essentials for this service.
  - > As an aside, whilst re-reading the Isaiah passage, I found it interesting that the suffering servant is described as having “no form or majesty that we should look at him”. Just someone unremarkable – perhaps that's why the disciples didn't recognise him at first? Just a man who looked like any other?
  - > We turn to the prophecy of Isaiah – and for the moment lets apply it to Jesus: We are told that the un-named servant will suffer – suffer at the hands of God (and I remain uncomfortable about that part, which is why I left it out). But that this suffering will bring about the healing of many; “by his bruises we are healed” (5b).
  - > A pointer for the travellers on the road to Emmaus that this terrible episode does, in fact, end with hope.
  - > If we look a little further on in Isaiah 53 we read of what may be a hint about resurrection – and Jesus certainly said that is what would happen. It also speaks about salvation too.
  - > The NIV has the clearest translation here (IS 53: 11-12)
- “After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,  
and he will bear their iniquities.  
Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,

and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.”

> “He will see the light of life” – maybe it was beginning to dawn on those two disciples that the horrible crucifixion of Jesus was not the end and that what the women had told them earlier that morning was, in fact, true?

> We know the rest of the story so well – it’s one of my favourites. And it reaches its conclusion when Jesus is invited into a house to share a meal. It is at the breaking of bread that they finally recognise Jesus.

> Where this all took place, I think, has an important bearing for us in our current situation.

> The encounter with the risen Saviour was not in a high and holy place – Jesus didn’t appear to them in the great temple in all its finery – no. Jesus sat next to them at the table – eating an everyday meal – just as he had done so many times before.

> And that is what I hope we can discover from the text today as we are stuck under lock-down.

> Time and time again Jesus went to people’s homes to heal, to share meals, to explain parables and teach. And in last week’s Gospel reading Jesus suddenly appeared to the frightened disciples who had locked themselves inside a room out of fear.

> Jesus meets those who are frightened, perplexed, in need of healing – not in any grand place of worship, but *at home*.

> I find this so encouraging in these days when we need to stay at home, when we can’t gather in our usual places of worship. Jesus came to be where people were – Jesus can make our homes His home too.

> When we sit down to break bread around the kitchen or dining table, He will be there with us too.

> I have heard of a tradition that some people even set an empty place at their meals for Jesus.

> It is also a model of the early church too, as those first followers of Jesus did worship in the Jerusalem temple, but then gathered in each other’s homes to pray and learn and break bread. I appreciate that we can’t go as far as gathering in any groups – but what I’d like to emphasize is the importance of home to our faith.

> I suggest to you today that this time of lock-down has actually given us a golden opportunity to rediscover an aspect of our faith that those of us who don’t attend house groups miss – the gift of welcoming Jesus into our homes.

> For that is where we worship these days, this is where we break bread – maybe this is where we discover we have surprising company?

> So there is a really positive aspect of these weeks at home that we can carry on from this Easter time onward into the future with us.

