Sunday 19th April

Seeing Jesus

I will sing the wondrous story <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDPCFbAysBc>

Lord, as we come today to worship you, may we learn from you, may we see you; touch our lives, open our hearts, speak to us we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Luke 24:13-32

**13**Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+24%3A13-49&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-26005a)] from Jerusalem. **14**They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. **15**As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; **16**but they were kept from recognising him.

**17**He asked them, ‘What are you discussing together as you walk along?’

They stood still, their faces downcast. **18**One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, ‘Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?’

**19**‘What things?’ he asked.

‘About Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. **20**The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; **21**but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. **22**In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning **23**but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. **24**Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.’

**25**He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! **26**Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ **27**And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

**28**As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further. **29**But they urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them.

**30**When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. **31**Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. **32**They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’

Just take a moment, take a pen and a piece of paper, and write down for yourself some of the questions this story raises for you. Maybe I can answer some of them today; if I don’t, perhaps you could look up some answers for yourself or discuss them with others, or even better, pray and ask for God’s help.

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So these are some of the questions this story raises for me. Why didn’t the men recognise Jesus? Why did he ask them what had happened rather than telling them who he was? Why were they still downcast when they had heard that he had risen? Why does Luke include this story, a man named Cleopas and an unnamed follower, but omits any detail about something we will read later, which is that Jesus appeared to Simon (Peter)? Why were their eyes opened right at the end – and why did Jesus disappear?

A lot of questions for 20 verses! Sometimes the Bible does raise more questions than it answers, doesn’t it? But this is how we learn – by asking questions. And we grow by answering them. So when Jesus asked the men what had been going on, he was getting them to tell him their take on the story. As they explained to him what he already knew, they had to think about what they believed, what they had hoped for, what they didn’t understand. They started to think about their own questions. Only when they knew what they were asking could Jesus answer it.

Try rewriting the story the way we might like it. It’s helpful sometimes! Jesus appears to Cleopas and the other man, shows himself. They are overjoyed to find out that he is alive. Are they really ready to listen to a lecture about the Scriptures? Are they really going to tell him their doubts, now that those doubts are gone? Or are their minds, and their questions, going to be focussed on the more natural ‘Where have you been? Where are you going? What happens next?’

Jesus needs to lay a foundation in these men’s lives. He starts where they are, he starts with their questions, he explains what has happened from what they already know and believe. He gets them, as I asked you, to ask their questions – and then he answers them. Not very politely, either: “How foolish you are!” I’m not going to do that. But he needs them to know how much they **don’t** understand, before he can explain it to them. They were disappointed by his death, and grieving; they were confused by the empty tomb. Jesus has the answer to both, but they have to be ready to listen.

So Jesus explains the Scriptures to these downcast men, and they do understand. They invite him to eat with them – perhaps they want to hear more, perhaps just natural politeness. But having walked for miles with this man they did not recognise, they ask him to break the bread. Perhaps if we met with a great teacher and asked him in for a meal, we might invite him to say grace. And something in the way he did that, in the breaking of the bread, opened their eyes and they knew him.

Now we may never know why Jesus was not recognised before. We don’t know how well they knew him before this; we don’t know if his resurrection body was different to his earthly one; we don’t know if he was cloaked or if there was some supernatural intervention to prevent them from knowing who he was while he taught them. But they discovered, as they sat down to eat with him, that the Messiah they were trying to follow, the Jesus they were trying to understand, had been with them all along.

It reminds me of the poem ‘footprints’. When have been through tough times thinking we were alone, that hope was lost, we look back and realise that Jesus has been right there with us. We might not recognise him at the time, but we have been learning from him, we have been pouring out our souls to him, we have been encouraged and built up by him. And he reveals himself to us in the breaking of bread. It is an encouragement to us as we come to communion on zoom later on, that through this we can know Jesus better.

So Jesus revealed himself to the disciples at that meal – and then he disappeared. He disappeared to give them time together to talk and process what had happened; to let the lesson sink in. We love to dwell in the presence of the Lord, but we cannot live permanently in a state of awe and wonder – at least not in this life. We have work to do! We know Jesus is with us always, we know his Spirit lives within us, but we do not always see him and that’s the way it has to be. That is certainly the pattern of Jesus’ resurrection appearances.

Let’s carry on the story with verses 33-49.

**33**They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together **34**and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ **35**Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

**36**While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’

**37**They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. **38**He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? **39**Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’

**40**When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. **41**And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ **42**They gave him a piece of broiled fish, **43**and he took it and ate it in their presence.

**44**He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’

**45**Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. **46**He told them, ‘This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, **47**and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **48**You are witnesses of these things. **49**I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’

As the two men went and gave their witness of Jesus’ work in their lives, he appeared among them once again. He showed himself to them, and they still struggled to believe. It was so out of the ordinary, it was quite literally unbelievable. And so, again, he ate with them. Not because he needed food but to prove the reality of his bodily return. The risen Jesus was no ghost, no spirit – he was a man. We still can’t really comprehend it ourselves. He operated under different rules, but he still had a physical body.

And as he ate, he taught them again, about the Scriptures, about himself. He told them what was written, he gave them a job to do as his witnesses, and he made them a promise of the Holy Spirit. And, according to Luke, he then left them and ascended to heaven.

The resurrection appearances in Luke are primarily accompanied by this sense, yes of joy but also of teaching, and understanding. Finally these disciples who never fully understood Jesus while he was alive, would understand him after his death and his resurrection. They understood him because Jesus opened their eyes to see him.

Throughout his life, he opened the eyes of the blind – now he did the same for the minds of his followers. We will come another day to the conversion of Saul in Acts, where Jesus made him blind; or we could say Jesus showed him his spiritual blindness, before Ananias came and prayed and ‘scales fell from his eyes’. The scales are falling from the eyes of the disciples so they can see and understand who Jesus is – the Messiah they had been waiting for, even though they did not recognise him.

Maybe some of us need that today too. There are so many questions, worries, doubts. The scriptures say things that we don’t understand. We can talk about it, we can study for ourselves, we can try to answer each other. But what it really takes is for the risen Jesus to open our eyes, that we might know him.

Sometimes in the busyness of life we fail to recognise the one who is walking alongside us. Sometimes we are so concerned with our own questions that we don’t take time to listen to the one who has the answers. I know that is true for me at times. I was reminded last week that I have not been taking the time I need to take just to be with Jesus, just to walk, just to listen. I was trying to answer all my own questions rather than letting him speak to me. I needed to repent, to come back and sit at his feet. I needed to break bread with him, to ask him to open my eyes.

And we are going to do that now, if you are listening in live time, at 11:00am this Sunday morning we will meet online on Zoom (if you haven’t got the details you should have a few minutes to call me); we will break bread together and share communion, asking Jesus to open our eyes that we might see the one who has been with us all along. Bring your bread and your wine as we seek him together.

But we are going to close the sermon this morning by singing, open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eerjElgk4Dg>