

Good morning. Welcome to a podcast for the readings for the main Sunday morning service on the 26th April.

On Sunday morning the website will have a podcast for a service of morning prayer as well as a separate podcast of the readings that are used for this reflection as well as in the live 10 O'Clock service with Rev Martin on Zoom.



The road to Emmaus

The gospel story is about a meeting on a road that went from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. The year for us is 2020, two thousand and twenty years since the birth of Christ. But for those who met on the Emmaus road the year was 3793, this the number of years since creation in the Jewish tradition. I think that we can make sense of this – every year we celebrate Christmas and New Year, when we add an extra digit onto the years since the birth of Jesus. Back in the gospel stories an extra year would be added to the total number of years from when creation was thought to have taken place.

A strange question, now, given that we are in April but what do you normally do in the days after Christmas Day and Boxing day? I cannot speak for you but I suspect you are like me, in the weeks leading *up to* Christmas, stupidly busy as the world seems to get ready for ‘the big day’. Presents, family, church, TV, the left overs on Boxing Day, and then, then in the days afterwards the slow process of returning to some sort of normality, a few more friends and family to meet, catch up on news, eat a bit more food, start making the preparations to travel to our homes if they are far away. Same time next year, and we’ll do it all over again. It’s part of the times and seasons that underpin our whole lives.

Back in the our gospel story, back in the year 3793 as two figures walked on the Road to Emmaus it was in many ways that same familiar and annual sorting things out after a great national feast. For us every year we have Christmas, for them it was the great annual Jewish feast of Passover. Each year the city of Jerusalem crammed with the great and the good and many, many more, each and every one of them important to God, both the Jews and the many foreigners. And now the familiar journey to gets things back to normal, so many loose ends to tidy up, so many people to get back to their homes and back to their normal lives.

This year was different. The two figures are likely to be a man called Ceophas and his wife Mary. Both knew Jesus. Both had been with Jesus in Jerusalem at the feast of Passover. This year was different and things had gone badly wrong, Mary had been with Jesus, at his execution, she was amongst those at the foot of the cross, at the feast of the Passover, she had witnessed first-hand the death of Jesus.

Most of us this story well. The two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, talking to each other about all the things that had happened – if that was you and what else would we be talking about?! Whilst they were still talking Jesus came and went with them, but they did not recognise him.

We know this story well but I can think of few years in which we can relate as well to the world of Ceophas and Mary on the road to Emmaus. Each year the times and seasons of their world had ticked along its predictable manner. Each year much in the same way that we do Christmas, they would do Passover. But this year, the year 3793, their world had been turned upside down, the normal ways of doing things thrown into disarray. One can imagine their conversation on the road: How have things changed? How are we are we going to cope? What is going to happen in the weeks and months ahead?

We don't need reminding how our world had been turned upside down, the normal ways of doing things thrown into disarray. How things have changed. How are we going to cope? What is going to happen in the weeks and months ahead?

As Ceophas and Mary were on their journey Jesus came near and went with them.

One of the puzzling parts of the story is that Ceophas and Mary seem happy to walk with this third person but they do not recognise him as Jesus. I'm inclined, this year, to be more sympathetic, less puzzled over this.

As we continue under lock down Jesus comes near me and near you. I am confident that like Ceophas and Mary I often fail to recognise the presence of Christ with me today, in the creation of God around me, in the people I see around me, and even in myself.

So what happens next?

If our calendar had been reset at the formation of our 'beautiful and ancient town of Richmond' then we would be in the year 949. Next year the town celebrates its 950th anniversary and we the church family fully intends to join in the party! Never in its 949 years of history has the church family had to keep themselves apart on a Sunday morning, our contact

with each other limited to phone calls and e-mails and podcasts and the brave step this Sunday morning of a live stream Eucharist on computers with Rev Martin. What next?!

So what happened next with Ceophas and Mary and Jesus? As they reached their lodgings in Emmaus it was getting dark. Jesus joined them at their table, he took bread, he blessed it, he broke it, he shared it, and *then* Ceophas and Mary realised not only that Jesus was with them but Jesus had *been* with them on their journey on the road to Emmaus.

This knowledge of the presence of the living God would not take away the questions and challenges facing Ceophas and Mary as they face a difficult world that had changed so much for them. But it would transform their lives and the lives of so many other people both from their year back in 3793 through the next two thousand years to ourselves today. The knowledge of the love of God prompting us to respond by loving God, by loving others, and loving ourselves.

As I write this reflection I have no idea how the livestreamed service of the Eucharist will go. Based on recent Sunday mornings we will have 30, 40, perhaps more people all appearing on the screen, others connected by phone. Will the internet connection allow for a smooth and unbroken connection with each other as we celebrate a spiritual communion together?

As we remain in lockdown and we wait the new normal that lies ahead of us may we continue to reimagine how to be a church family journeying with the risen Lord Jesus. May our spiritual connection remain smooth and unbroken both with Christ and each other, as we learn to love more, by loving God, by loving others, and by loving ourselves. Amen.