

## Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2024

All material © Heather Whyte unless stated otherwise.

God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Introduction

Story – [Owl babies](#) by Martin Waddell

The owls were afraid, they did not know where their mummy had gone and were afraid she would not come back. She did and all was well.

After the crucifixion the disciples were afraid, they knew Jesus had gone, into a tomb dead and they did not expect him to come back. Then on Easter Day the women went to the tomb and found it empty, the disciples did not know what to believe, but we know through stories that Jesus did live on and he appeared to the disciples in different ways. For some it was a joyous revelation but for others it brought more uncertainty until they had worked through what it all meant.

### Reflective reading of Luke 24:13-38, & 45-49

<sup>13</sup>Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

Two disciples, not of the twelve but a reminder that over the three years many more disciples joined the ranks, and some of them were women. The disciples thought they knew who Jesus was but the events of the last few days had left them unsure and the recent rumours added to the uncertainty.

Surely we can empathise, world events and sometimes family events, can leave us doubting what we were sure of, often we hear people asking how there can be a God when such horrible things happen. How do we answer that? For me the answer involves the free will that we are given as part of the unconditional love. Unconditional love means that no matter what we do we are still loved, and that is great but it leaves us free to do some pretty horrific things, sometimes even in the name of religion. God allows us to choose and often the consequences are hurtful for others. Sometimes things just happen, good people get sick, they have not been singled out for punishment they simply got sick like so many others.

<sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

This was not the first time they had met Jesus, they were disciples after all. So, why did they not recognise him? That is part of the resurrection mystery, or perhaps they were so wrapped up in their thoughts that they did not really look. Jesus walked alongside them. We can imagine Jesus simply walking alongside and listening, then that question – What are you talking about?

They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"

They stop dead, and perhaps for the first time register his presence. The stop, astounded that anyone could not know what has happened, and yet as momentous as the event was for the disciples and those around Jesus there must have been thousands of people in Jerusalem who were unaware of the significance of that particular crucifixion, it was not the only one on that day after all.

We can all become so overcome by things that we lose our perspective. Then we need someone to come alongside and ask those vital questions that allow us to say out loud what we feel. In doing so, often we begin to see things differently, we begin to join some dots or perhaps undo some knots in our joining.

Sometimes we can be the person who walks alongside, listening and asking questions, and waiting.

<sup>19</sup>He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.

<sup>21</sup>But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

They had stopped, but now I imagine them walking on, side by side, telling their story again to this stranger. Perhaps it got a bit muddled, perhaps things were exaggerated, perhaps things were forgotten. We will never know, but we do know that sometimes that happens to us.

There is a significance also in the walking side by side. It is easier to share deep feelings when you are not looking at someone. the car conversation as opposed to the table conversation.

Jesus listened to them and then challenged them.

<sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, "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.

Jesus wove the events into the bigger picture. We are told he reminded them of the things he shared with his disciples many times. Here you may all have a different take on the role of scripture, and the theories of prophecy and fulfilment.

For me, Jesus was an incredible human being, who came with a message so radical that it threatened the establishment, both civil and religious. It was, and is, a message so simple and yet so profoundly challenging. We are children of God, we are part of the oneness that is God, we are unconditionally loved and there is nothing we can do that can separate us from the oneness that is love.

The civil authorities wanted to control things, to control people, and especially those who did not 'fit' into their picture of society. They wanted a nice orderly society that lined their pockets and kept people in their place, and Jesus threatened that by suggesting that that everyone was equal and there was not first and last.

The religious authorities need people to need them, they were the intermediaries between God and humanity and as such they could charge for their services and people had no choice but to pay, that was what the turning of the tables was all about. Jesus threatened that by suggesting that anyone and everyone could have their own relationship with God and there was no need for intermediaries. The ten rules of Moses had become over 600 laws designed to make a relationship with God as difficult as possible and Jesus constantly challenged that, suggesting to the pharisees that there was another way of looking at things.

As he walked with these two disciples he did the same, whether it was prophecy and fulfilment as scripture would suggest, or whether it was look, these things had to happen, when you challenge there is always the danger that you upset people but that does not mean we should not challenge, we cannot know. However we can all have an opinion and believe. When we talk and share we are encouraged to look at different possibilities and that was what Jesus did for the two disciples.

<sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

<sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

This part of the story is perhaps the most mysterious, he vanished from their sight. In the same way as he appeared in a locked room, he disappeared without trace. He did not walk out of the door he simply vanished. He was no longer needed, the disciples had understood and now they would move on.

What we believe about life after this life is very personal. Did the disciples, in all the resurrection appearances, see a flesh and bone Jesus? We cannot know but what we can know is that all life is energy connected into something we perceive as a physical entity. So, maybe when we need reassurance, when we need to understand, those we have loved and lost do appear beside us.

In Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Harry has the resurrection stone and when he opens it he sees those he has loved and lost and they explain that they are always with him, in his heart, and as he faces the greatest challenge, choosing to sacrifice himself for the lives of his friends, he draws strength from the presence of loved ones around him. Harry dies and discovers he has a choice as to whether to come back. He chooses to return and finish the challenge of defeating Voldemort, a human so corrupted by fear and greed that he destroys anyone who threatens him, and in doing so Harry changes the world. It is a story, but it does make me think.

<sup>32</sup>They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

When the disciples recognised Jesus, they also recognised that even in the gloom of the walk and the talk something in them had changed. Later they would use this as proof of their story as they told the other disciples what had happened and this may suggest that it was a common feeling in the discipleship journey.

<sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

They arrived full of their story to discover that other disciples had experienced similar meetings. The resurrection appearances happened in different places and different ways and perhaps sometimes at the same time in different places. We have four gospels and they all paint a similar story but with different time lines and it is impossible at this distance to piece them together without some anomalies. As they talked another appearance occurred.

<sup>36</sup>While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>37</sup>They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. <sup>38</sup>He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

<sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Every disciple, every human is part of this promise. We have choices and how we use our choices will change the world, for better or for worse but change it we will.

Thought

Meeting God happens in many ways, and different ways for different people.

- It is nearly always unplanned and a surprise. I suspect we cannot manufacture these meetings.
- It is often along the way as we travel.
- We rarely recognise it at the time for what it is
- Such meetings bring about change, through challenge or comfort, through seeing a different perspective.

Enlightenment often sits alongside paradox, we don't get all the answers at once, we have to keep exploring, keep wondering. We are refreshed, re-directed or renewed by such experiences. They can happen when we are at our lowest, and they lift us, offering a glimpse of hope. They are not a protection against getting low again but they are moments of love and wonder that give us strength and courage.

Afterwards we will have a memory to treasure, but also a story to tell. We are left knowing, reassured, feeling loved and empowered by the experience. We cannot hold on to such meetings but we can expect more, that is our hope.

Part of our journey is to walk with others and be a part of the revelation of God in their lives, that is what being one is all about.