

**The Road to Emmaus: Luke 24:13-35**

Now on the day of the resurrection, two disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. 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?' 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, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 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. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 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. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 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?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

**SERMON**

Today is always a very special day in the church's calendar for Anglican clergy. It is the day when we gather in our Cathedrals to affirm our ordination vows, watch the consecration of holy oils by the bishop and receive our containers of oil to bring back and use in our parishes, and to share together in Holy Communion.

This year of course it has all been different. There has been no consecration of oil, we are not allowed to administer it anyway. The renewal of our commitment to the vows we made at ordination was done from our own studies using an online meeting tool called Zoom, and there was no sharing of bread and wine in Holy Communion. It has been the most unusual Lent and Holy week for me as I expect it has been for you. Easter morning will be a joyous celebration but coloured by the knowledge that our ordeal is not yet over. God is still risen, CoVID-19 doesn't change that, but we will still be in exile and isolation

I chose the Road to Emmaus reading because of what it tells us, or rather does not tell us about those two disciples first act of Communion after the resurrection. Precisely what you consider the bread and wine to be during our weekly communion services in church is between you and God. All four of our villages once had both Methodist and Baptist chapels. Sadly they are all closed but I am pleased that many of their members have found a new spiritual home in the Church of England and I am conscious that in my churches I now have congregation members from different backgrounds, and probably with many different concepts of what Communion is.

Tonight, as we celebrate the institution of the Lord's Supper, I have the perfect opportunity to talk about what Communion is and how we celebrate it, as a church in the current situation.

Those from presbyterian traditions will regard the bread and wine as a memorial meal, reflected in the words "We do this in remembrance of him", so the bread and wine need no special consecration. For those of you from this tradition, if you find having bread and wine with you during my services so that you can share in this memorial meal helpful in your worship then please do continue to do so.

Those of us from the catholic, episcopal traditions will regard the bread and wine as a sacramental meal, the elements of which must be physically consecrated by an episcopally ordained priest. This is reflected in the words by the priest "send your Holy Spirit that these gifts of bread and wine may be to use the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ"

For those of us from the catholic tradition, remote consecration of the bread and wine via the internet is not possible. This is in fact the official doctrine of the Church of England. So, at this special time of year when the Eucharist, or Mass or Holy Communion, call it what you will, are such an important part of our spiritual life, how then are we to celebrate?

The interesting thing about this reading from the Road to Emmaus is that we are told the two disciples recognised Jesus as he broke the bread and gave it to them, We are told that they returned to Jerusalem to tell the eleven what they had experienced. The reading does not tell us that they actually ate the bread they were given. Seeing Jesus break the bread was enough for their eyes to be opened and their lives changed.

The Book of Common Prayer instructs us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', although we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves; making a Spiritual Communion is particularly fitting for those who cannot receive the sacrament at the great feasts of the Church, and it fulfils the duty of receiving Holy Communion 'regularly, and especially at the festivals of Christmas, Easter and Whitsun or Pentecost'

At this time, when we cannot physically receive the body and blood of Christ we are now encouraged to make a Spiritual Communion as part the Body of Christ of which we are members. From now onwards, and until we can once again celebrate together, in the Eucharistic celebration, after I receive the physical bread and wine on behalf of us all, I will ask those of you who wish to join in a Spiritual Communion to join me in saying together the new prayer I have included on the congregation sheets

In making our communion spiritually, we are joining with Christians everywhere to be nourished by the one who tells us, 'I am the Bread of Life', the one who in our darkness is our light, the one who is risen again.

Amen.