

Easter Sunday - 4th April 2021

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[0 : 00] Hey everyone and a very happy Easter to you. Welcome to this session for Resurrection Sunday as we celebrate what Jesus rising from the dead means for you, for me, for us and for our world.

Indeed there's a traditional Easter greeting of praise which is used the world over on this special day. Alleluia. Jesus Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Well today is the last of three sessions from over these past few days as we've been reflecting on the Easter story. A holy hat-trick of homilies if you like taken in Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and now today on this Easter Sunday. If you haven't checked those sessions out do feel free to catch up with them here on YouTube. Indeed I'd encourage you to because if we skip from Palm Sunday last week to Easter Sunday this week without taking in the middle bits we're missing out on a crucial part of the story. The story in which Jesus's resurrection only makes sense if we enter into Jesus's death which preceded it too. And yet today God, well, it's all about resurrection. Today to look back on the events of that first resurrection Sunday, to look at the present and where we find ourselves with you and with each other, but also to look forward in light of the hope which Jesus's resurrection gives us for all that is to come. Help us please to straddle that past, present and future outlook all in the knowledge that, as it says in the Bible, Hebrews 13 verse 8, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. That's a verse which reveals that your resurrection power is eternal, part of your ongoing way in our world and that with you God there was, is and always will be hope.

So help us to tap into that truth today as we consider this life with you now. Thank you God. Amen. Now, according to the various gospel accounts and as you might imagine, the day of Jesus's resurrection is a pretty eventful one. For example, there's this very early start when some of the female followers of Jesus go to dress his dead body with spices, but arrive only to find the entrance stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Some of the gospels talk of angels being present. Other gospels indicate that Peter and John also went to investigate the empty tomb. Likewise, there are gospel accounts of Jesus appearing to all of the women who went to the tomb, or perhaps just to Mary Magdalene for a start.

It's all a bit fuzzy in terms of the order, things happened and when and to whom, but that fuzziness is hardly surprising given both the very early start, but also the head mash it must have been to discover Jesus was alive again. This resurrection Easter Sunday was a long day too, as right at the other end of the day, we're told Jesus makes a pretty late in the evening appearance to the disciples, showing them his hands and his feet, having a snack with them and so on by way of proving he wasn't a ghost or anything. Quite the day of drama for them to take on board. And yet in the mid-afternoon of that resurrection Sunday, Luke's gospel tells us of another encounter Jesus has, only this one seems to bring with it a far more gradual realisation that he has indeed risen from the dead. Here's that story from the final chapter of Luke's gospel.

[4 : 09] Now that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them. But they were kept from recognising him. He asked them, What are you discussing together as you walk along?

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

The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.

[5 : 21] And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but didn't find his body.

They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Then, some of our companions went to the tomb and found it, just as the women had said.

But they did not see Jesus. He said to them, how foolish you are. And how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther.

[6 : 28] 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. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them.

Then their eyes were opened. And they recognized him. And he disappeared from their sight. 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?

Now, it's interesting that of all the people Jesus could have appeared to, he decides to prioritize these two by giving them so much of his newly resurrected time.

I mean, for at least some of a seven-mile journey, followed by a bit of pre-supper chat in their home, well, we're talking at least spending a couple of hours together.

Indeed, the fact that we're told it was seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus might be significant, as whenever the number seven crops up in the Bible, it usually represents something which is meant to be seen as holy or complete.

[8 : 10] Seven days of creation in that Genesis poem, and so on. And so it seems Jesus felt compelled to devote significant time to these two followers.

But why? Well, I think all the clues we need to answer that question are there. For a start, Luke has already told us that some of the female disciples of Jesus had been down to the tomb early that morning, only to find it empty.

We know too that a couple of angels had been there telling the women about Jesus, saying, he is not here, he is risen. These women rush back to tell the other disciples, Peter being Peter, well, he runs to have a look for himself and tries to piece together in his own mind what has happened.

And yet, where were the two Emmaus Road companions at this point? Well, they were with the rest of the disciples in whatever room they were staying in, in Jerusalem.

Indeed, on their walk with this man they didn't recognise, but who turns out to be Jesus, they explained to him, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but didn't find his body.

[9 : 25] They came and told us that they'd seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Then, some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.

Now, given that this was the case, given the women's testimony, given an angelic message, given Peter and others had confirmed that the tomb was empty, you'd maybe have expected that these two would have at least stuck around in Jerusalem for the rest of the day with the other disciples in order to try and make sense of what had happened.

And yet, what are we told they did? Well, they went home. Starting out probably just after lunch on a seven-mile walk back home.

Which is not exactly what you'd expect, because you'd kind of think they'd want to stick with their friends at this point, stick with their community and try and work out what's happened.

You know, try and work out what their next move might be. Do we go looking for Jesus? Do we wait here? Do we go back to the tomb or to the temple? You know, tell us again. What did the angels say?

[10 : 38] Should we pray together? You know, all sorts of different responses, but not, you'd have thought, oh, do you know what? I just want to go home. And yet, grief, confusion, tiredness, well, they do funny things to us.

And coupled with the fact that we told these two and the other followers of Jesus didn't believe the women's testimony, hence why Peter went to look at the tomb for himself. Well, I'm not blaming

these two for leaving, since they were obviously feeling pretty overwhelmed. And almost like a child who kind of tugs at their parents' legs while they're at some adult gathering saying, can we go home, please? They simply wanted to get back to what they knew. They wanted to go home. But at the exact moment these disciples should have been putting together, these two, for whatever reason, decided to bail.

But what's also interesting is that from the way they were talking to each other on their journey home, we know that they were not in the best of moods. I mean, Luke puts it like this.

[11 : 47] As they talked and discussed these things together, Jesus himself came up and walked alongside them. Now, disgust is one way to translate the Greek word Luke originally uses, but a more accurate, common translation would be debated or argued even.

These two, they're not, it seems, in agreement with each other. Arguing, perhaps, about whether they should have stayed with the others, what it all means, you know, shall we turn around, what if Jesus is alive and we've missed him, and so on.

You can imagine one saying to the other, I don't know, I just want to go home. And yet, maybe the somewhat heated nature of their debate explains why they didn't recognise Jesus when he approaches, because they're too immersed, they're too angry, perhaps, in their own argument. Now, Jesus asks them, what are you discussing together as you walk along? Although, again, that translation is putting it mildly because the Greek term discussing literally means what are you throwing at each other, implying that it's a pretty lively debate.

And perhaps this mood explains why their response is pretty terse to Jesus, saying, are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?

[13 : 13] In other words, you know, what are you, some kind of ignorant tourist? What things, says Jesus? Always with the question, giving him a chance to talk while he listens.

It's a question, though, which provokes a stream of detail from them which serves to highlight their confusion, their dashed hopes, perhaps, about just who Jesus was and now what's happened with his death and his rumours of his return.

And yet still, they don't recognise it's Jesus they're talking to. You know, they're a mess. They're not thinking clearly. They're running back home, almost trying to run away from or escape their confusion.

Now, Luke then gives us Jesus' reply. As we're told, he responds by saying to them, how foolish you are and how slow of heart you are to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

You know, when we read it on paper on our screens in the Bible, it sounds a bit of a harsh thing for Jesus to say. But I love the way this video reenactment portrays things as it has Jesus say it in a gentle way with a wry smile even, a little twinkle in his eye, you know, how foolish you are, how slow of heart.

[14 : 31] It's almost like, what are we going to do with you, eh? And then Jesus goes on to unpack all that the scriptures has foretold about him. Something which sounds to me like the greatest Bible study ever.

And again, in the video, there's a beautifully understated tear which forms and rolls down one of their cheeks. A visible hint of their inner confusion, their grief, relief, but also perhaps relief that there's still hope in the story they'd been a part of for so long.

Relief that they later admit meant that their hearts were burning within them as Jesus opened the scriptures to them. You see, that's why I think Jesus pursues these two followers of his in particular. He's behaving just as you'd hope he would. like a shepherd who goes out looking for the lost sheep who have wandered away from the fold. Seeking out those who are confused, grieving, those who are trying to find their way home when all along their real home is with the other sheep in community, working things out together.

Indeed, it's interesting that Jesus' true identity isn't revealed until they're about to share a meal together later that evening. All we're told from before is that they were kept from recognising him.

[15 : 57] Now, that could be Jesus being deliberately coy or vague and so on, but rather, I suspect it was these two themselves and their states of mind which was keeping them from recognising Jesus.

You see, from their terse, argumentative start, these two have gradually been transformed from initially ridiculing the stranger in their midst. You know, are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who doesn't know?

To now insisting that he comes to eat with them, offering him their hospitality and their welcome. And maybe it's at this moment of rediscovering the joy of being in community with others that their eyes are opened to the truth of who Jesus is.

What's more, I think it's no surprise that it's in the moment of Jesus breaking bread that his identity becomes clear because as we saw on that Maundy Thursday night, Jesus' act of breaking bread is his way of saying, look, my friendship, my relationship with you is rooted in community, it's rooted in sharing a meal together, in giving and receiving, in washing each other's feet, in being humble enough to admit that we're broken, but then feeding on me in order that you can support each other and the wider world in that brokenness.

And then, having broken bread, Jesus disappears. How? We're not told. But why? Well, I guess his work with these two was done for now, because what's their first response to recognising the risen Jesus?

[17:40] Well, we're told they got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. the road to Emmaus became the road from Emmaus.

They returned to their community. They returned to their fold. You see, I think that was Jesus' intention all along, in that by pursuing these two companions on the Emmaus road, he'd help them to not only recognise his resurrection, but ensure that they returned to and were rooted in their community.

I think, too, that's why Jesus appeared to and spent time with his other disciples after he'd risen, not simply as evidence that he was alive, but because he wanted to make sure they were united in their love for him and for each other.

That's why Jesus made a point of appearing to Mary, to Thomas, why he spent time with Peter on the beach, all as ways of ensuring they'd be part of this new, communal, ongoing way of life. lived out in the wholesome peace and the joyful love of his resurrection life. I am the resurrection and the life, says Jesus.

[18:59] There's little point in being resurrected unless the life following that resurrection isn't shaped by that resurrection truth as well. people.

And so for us, well I'd say this Easter and the season to come is an opportunity for us to begin to find a way to reconnect with our communities.

You see, just as these two Emmaus road companions handled their trauma at Jesus dying in their own way, so too over this past year and more, each of us will have experienced and handled the pandemic in our own unique ways.

Some may have mentally and emotionally coped pretty well. Others of us will have struggled in all sorts of ways. Some will have been really consistent at keeping up with people.

Others may have become more introspective, less inclined to engage with folks. Some will have got stuck in to active service. Others will have been more hesitant or unable to do so.

[20:11] Some will have desperately wanted to join together with others. Others will have wanted to stay at home and be by themselves. For some, their faith will have flown.

For others, their faith will have faltered. And yet, the good news is that whatever our journey over this past year has involved, just as it was for these two Emmaus road companions, so too for us, because Jesus has been travelling with us all along, even if we haven't always realised it.

Now, I'd say that's a truth which has two implications for us. Firstly, I'd suggest that we do well not to judge the way that those around us have handled things during the pandemic.

These have been extraordinary times where our individual capacity to cope will have been tested to the max, all without our usual support structures being present.

And so, just as Jesus was gentle with these two on the road, so too, we'd do well to be gentle, kind, patient, gracious with each other.

[21:29] I've got no idea really what you've been dealing with deep down, just as you can't be sure you know what I've been wrestling or struggling with. Equally, we may have been disappointed at the way certain friends or family members have not been in touch as much as we would have hoped.

We might have felt let down by our church, by the vicar, the support that's been offered or not been offered. We might have found our community life is not what we'd hoped it would have been.

I get that and I feel some of those emotions myself. And yet my gut also tells me that in light of the resurrection, it's probably time to hand those disappointments, that grief, maybe that anger over to

God and say, look, I don't want to carry that anymore.

I want to start again. I'm tired of the year we've had. I want to start again. I want to start treating people with a clean slate, admitting, yeah, we might have messed up.

I certainly have messed up and maybe each of us could have done more, but let's start again with each other, shall we? Now, time will tell whether these refreshed relationships will last, but I don't know about you, I don't want to carry anger or disappointment with me.

[22 : 50] It's just not good for me. It's not sustainable. Instead, just as Jesus does with these two, yes, we might need to express that anger, that grief, that disappointment, but as soon as we can, let's break bread together, shall we?

Because in doing so, we may just find a new way to relate to one another emerges. And that's the second implication of the fact that Jesus has been travelling with us all along.

You see, I don't think Jesus wants us to strike out on our own, to take our ball and go home, if you like, to disengage from community life, at least not for longer than is healthy.

Rather, as our good shepherd, he pursues us in order to encourage us to return and take our place back in the fold. And so, as our communal life begins, slowly but surely, to open up again, my hunch is that Jesus would encourage us to get stuck in with each other as and when it's safe to do so.

Just as anger or disappointment is unsustainable, so too is isolation, and Jesus proves how central the communal life is to following him as a resurrected saviour.

[24 : 13] Yes, we'll need to take it gently, we might need the equivalent of that seven-mile walk back to Jerusalem in order to prepare ourselves for what's to come. But it's good to be together.

Now, that might not mean returning to exactly the same communities or groups that we were a part of prior to the pandemic. We might feel over this last year, we realise it's time for a new location, perhaps a new church, a new activity, and so on.

And that's for us to work out with God and with each other. But whatever community we choose to engage with from here, we can do so having handed over to God any anger or disappointment we might have been carrying, and we can do so looking forward to what a newly resurrected community life might look like.

That's a key part of the Easter message message for me. An encouragement from Jesus to start again with each other and with him as part of a resurrection community.

And I'll close with this. You know, almost as soon as these two Emmaus Road companions returned to the other disciples and filled them in on what had been happening, Luke tells us that while they were still talking, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you.

[25 : 45] As we look forward to what this new season ahead will bring, may we know the peace of God with us as we rebuild and as God resurrects our common life together.

All right, let's have a song from the St. John's Band. which they've recorded this week, a song called My Hope and a song whose words perhaps tie in nicely with all that we've been looking at today.

Nothing will change if all the plans I make are wrong your love and your love stays the same. Your light will guide me through it all.

I'm hanging on. I'm leaning into you. nothing can reach the end of all your faithfulness.

Your grace is with me. Through every shadow, every test, I'm hanging on. I'm leaning into you.

[27 : 11] I'm stepping upuntune I'm moving for theu because I love it to be worth it.

as I am is built on nothing less than Your great love, Your righteousness.

I will not walk another way. I trust Your heart. I trust Your name.

I'm holding on. I'm holding on to You.

I'm holding on to You.

[28 : 12] You are my rock. When storms are raging all along, You shout to me, God. I'm safe with You on sonic ground. I'm hanging on. I'm leading in to You.

I don't know where You'll take me, but I know You're always good.

My hope is built on nothing less than Your great love, Your righteousness.

I will not walk another way. I trust Your heart. I trust Your name.

I'm holding on. I'm holding on to You.

[29 : 21] My hope is built on nothing less than Your great love, Your righteousness.

I will not walk another way. I trust Your heart. I trust Your name.

I'm holding on. I'm holding on to You.

I'm holding on. I'm holding on to You.
I'm holding on. I'm holding on. I'm holding on to You.
[30 : 38] I'm holding on to You.

My hope is built on nothing less than Your great love, Your righteousness.
I will not walk another way. I trust Your heart. I trust Your name.

I am holding on to You. My hope is built on nothing less than Your great love, Your happiness. I trust Your love, Your happiness.

I trust your love, Your happiness. I trust Your love, Your happiness. very much for your continued engagement and support of these YouTube sessions. Heartfelt thanks to the band as well for their continued musical excellence, especially over this Easter season. My thanks as well to Lottie for all of her Sunday Stars videos and in particular the delivery of all those Good Friday workshop packs and Easter eggs over this weekend. There's no extra time this week but we will be back next time with a full quota of videos. As I said at the top, Happy Easter to you and if you're lying low this week after Easter I hope it's a relaxing week for you even if the weather is looking a trifle ropey. Well, whether at work, rest or play, come rain or shine, let's ask for God's blessing to go with us. And so, may the blessing of God, the one who through

[32 : 30] Jesus demonstrates his resurrection power and hope. May God's blessing rest on you, on me, all those who God has given us to love, both this Easter time and forevermore. Amen.

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