

Heavenly Father, Thank you for bringing us all together today to praise and worship you. Take my lips and speak through them, take our minds and think through them, take our hearts and set them on fire with love for yourself.

AMEN

Whilst I and my family lived in the Netherlands and later Denmark, we joined walking clubs. Various lengths of walk were signposted, we generally did the 5km ones as the children were still young. We collected the medals and had lots of fun. During our posting to Denmark I along with my friend Lesley rashly announced that we would take part in a longer 80 kilometer or 50 mile, 2 day march organised by the military. The first non military females to take part. We were young and fit so it would take much effort, our training consisted of walking to the nearest coffee shop for pastries. Big mistake. Day one was progressively easy, fun, tiring, tough and then painful. A warm healing soak and an early night readied us for day 2. Oh dearie me, we could barely move, everything screamed as we moved, however, we loosened up and carried on. The final checkpoint was just 10k from the end. I mentioned I was in agony from one of my knees, it was suggested that a medic look at it. And that ladies and gentlemen is how I found myself having a beer whilst a devastatingly handsome German medic gave my troublesome knee a massage, prior to finishing the march.

It taught me that as much as I liked a walk I am extremely thankful that I have transport for the longer journeys.

Today we heard the narrative of the 2 travelers returning home to Emmaus, it was usual to walk everywhere, it's a well known story so I'd like to start by asking you to close your eyes, take yourself off to the middle east and imagine the scene playing out. Where are you in the scene - are you one of the main players?, observing from the sidelines out of sight?, hurrying past as it's none of your business? Can you feel the dying heat of the day, the dust on your feet, the smells of the territory, how do you feel? Tired, thirsty, bewildered, hopeless? Be aware of all these things.

Now let's look at it in a bit more detail. 2 disciples were travelling home, it was thought that they were Cleopas and a companion, possibly his wife, returning home to Emmaus. Emmaus has never been definitely identified, 7 miles from Jerusalem is mentioned, whether that was a round trip or 7 miles each way is unknown. Maybe as Emmaus has never been identified, it is nowhere because it is everywhere. Consider where your road to Emmaus may be. The travellers were confused and scared, Jesus in whom they had invested

so much hope had died an awful death on the cross, put to death by the very people that they had thought he would help them overthrow.

A stranger approached and joined them. Verse 16 says that ‘They were kept from recognising him’. How? Did God intervene, if so why? Perhaps they didn’t recognise him because they were so wrapped up in their own troubles and disappointments. As far as they were concerned Jesus, who was to be their rescuer, was dead. The same happened to Mary, in the Gospel of John 20:14 it tells us that when she was at the tomb, she didn’t recognise Jesus standing by her because she thought he was dead. Maybe they were seeing him out of context, we’ve all seen someone and thought ‘why do I know them?’ Maybe they didn’t want to engage with a stranger therefore they didn’t look at him too clearly, after all if a stranger came up to you and started talking to you would you engage with them????

Can you imagine the look on the faces of the travellers when Jesus asked, ‘what’s going on’, ‘what are you discussing?’ They must have thought it odd, how can anyone not know about the most talked about, biggest news story of the last few days and weeks. So they recounted all the goings on about a man called Jesus of Nazareth, a man who had represented so much hope but had proved to be powerless in the face of the despised Romans and was put to such a shameful death; furthermore, to top it all his body was now missing. They thought that the body had been stolen, they didn’t understand that Jesus had risen, despite the evidence that the women at the tomb had said so, the scriptures had foretold the same but still they did not believe. They couldn’t understand how at the very least God hadn’t intervened to save Jesus. It was Passover week so Jerusalem was filled to the brim with Jews from all over the country, this was not some small insignificant event that only the disciples witnessed, the whole nation had heard of it, it was headline news, discussed and known by everyone, everyone except apparently this one lone traveller. During this time Jesus listened, he didn’t ask questions, didn’t interrupt, he just listened, hearing their despair and confusion.

When they had finished their tale of woe, Jesus addressed their worries, but he didn’t console them, he didn’t pat them on the back and send them on their way with a cheery, ‘don’t worry better days are coming’ no, he rebuked them verse 25 gives us his answer ‘you foolish men, have you learned nothing, do you not recognise the fulfillment of the prophets?’ He proceeded to retell and explain the whole narrative from Moses to their present day. He helped them to understand that the agony of the cross was necessary to fulfill God’s promise and that everything was done out of love for us. Once they

understood, their hearts burned with a fierce joy but still they did not recognise him.

As the day was drawing to a close, they arrived near to the village where the disciples lived, , Jesus looked to be going further until he was invited in. Notice that - he did not impose himself, he waited to be asked. This tells us that he will not foist himself on us just because we know of his existence, we have to invite him into our lives, our hearts and our minds. We have to give ourselves to him utterly and completely and then sit back and wait to see what he has in mind for us. After all, who amongst you all would ever have thought in a million years that I'd be up here doing this, so totally not on my bucket list, however, here I am, God's will not mine.

The 3 stopped for a meal, the state of affairs in Jerusalem was still the subject of the conversation, they expressed their disappointment, their feeling of abandonment, their hopelessness, Jesus was supposed to redeem them from the rule of the Romans, and rescue Israel from its enemies, they envisioned a great mighty military ruler who would empower the people to defeat their adversaries. They still didn't realise that the risen Lord had given them the greatest gift - freedom from the slavery of sin. As they sat together and shared a meal they perhaps had acknowledged what Jesus was saying they, however, still added a 'yes but'.

As the guest Jesus was given the honour of breaking the bread at the meal, he proceeded to give thanks and broke it, as he did so the truth finally dawned on the 2 travellers, their eyes were opened to the truth, they simultaneously recognised Jesus as he disappeared. Similarly in the Garden of Eden when Eve gave Adam the forbidden fruit, their eyes were opened and they gained knowledge of that which they were not supposed to have. The difference was that Adam and Eve were ignorant of the forbidden knowledge whereas the 2 disciples knew of the knowledge but were blinded to it by their own concerns and doubts.

In their excitement they hurried back to Jerusalem, never mind that not too long before they were tired, hungry and it was a long way back, they rushed to find the eleven apostles, declaring that it is true, Jesus is alive, they had recognised him when he broke the bread with them. They knew that death had been defeated, not like Lazarus or the daughter of Jairus, they would have to face death all over again. The prophets were right, Jesus has risen. Well who knew?

So a simple walk home followed by a meal, a very ordinary everyday situation, no fireworks, no tongues of fire, no rushing wind or angelic messengers. We don't have to look for the spectacular to find Jesus, we can encounter him in ordinary everyday life, we may even find him in unexpected places, and no I don't mean when you're in the bathroom or skinny dipping, but in the single spring flower along the roadside, the rainbow on a stormy day, or even whilst having a knee massage. What difference does the resurrection make in your life? Apart from Easter Sunday do you ever think about it, does it affect your words, your actions, your witness. Jesus is alive and he wants us to share that experience with him and to show it in our everyday ordinary lives.

The story of the 2 travellers teaches us to go back to the Scriptures to find answers, if you are not confident of where to look or what it all means, then find someone who has studied them and can explain them to make them relevant to you. Not to put any pressure on Tony or Liz but they should know the scriptures better than most.

Or remember the 2 travellers, they already had the answers, they just didn't realise it, they were too wrapped up with their own problems, too inward looking, making their thoughts and actions overly important. I ask you again to close your eyes and think of the scene once more being played out before you. Be amongst it anew with fresh eyes, Has your position changed?, the heat, the smells, your tired dusty feet will all be the same but are you now more central to the action. Do you have the confidence to acknowledge that Jesus has risen and is waiting to do marvelous things if you let him.

May our eyes be opened, so that we can recognize Jesus in our midst. May our hearts burn with joy as we see our story wrapped up in his. And may we always be eager to share the joy of his resurrection and presence among us. To the glory of God. Amen.