

Sunday 22 April 2012

Reading: Luke 24:13-32 (NT page)

### **Sermon**

The text verses for the sermon:

*30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> 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?"*

The story of Jesus' appearance on the road to Emmaus is the first of three resurrection appearances reported in Luke and is unique to his Gospel.

The Greek text says they went to Emmaus which was 60 stadia from Jerusalem. "Sixty stadia" was about seven miles. We do not know the exact site of Luke's Emmaus. What we do know, is that there was more than one place in Palestine called Emmaus. They went on the same day as it was discovered that the tomb was empty.

Jewish travellers would not consider it unusual for a stranger, who is also a fellow Jew, to join their small company walking for some distance, especially if they assume him to be a Passover pilgrim on his way home.

News spread quickly by word of mouth, and public executions at a feast would be widely discussed. No matter where a Greek-speaking pilgrim visiting Jerusalem for the feast was from, he or she would probably have heard something about these matters.

One of the men's name was Cleopas which was a Hebrew/Aramaic name. Cleopas' words reflect the confusion all Jesus' followers must have felt: Jesus was a prophet, according to the Prophecies in the Old Testament, or maybe the Messiah who will deliver them from the Roman oppression, which didnae happen. The religious leaders of the nation, who of all people should have embraced and followed him, had rejected him.

Part of the reason for the apostles' unbelief is that a resurrection of this nature contradicted their messianic expectations; another reason may have been that Jewish officials considered the witness of women nearly worthless, because they regarded women as unstable and undependable.

The resurrected Jesus, who is the stranger who joined them then speaks with a clear understanding of what really happened with Him, explicating all the passages in the Old Testament that bears witness to His true destiny and identity.

Jesus was very polite to make as if he would go on with his journey, without asking for their hospitality. In their society hospitality was a given especially when sundown was approaching like in our reading. Night travel, particularly as one got farther from Jerusalem, was dangerous due to robbers. Jewish people throughout the ancient world welcomed fellow Jews who were travelling to spend the night, and insistence was part of hospitality.

Hospitality was a crucial obligation; the host must feed the traveller who has graced his or her home by coming to spend the night. It was also part of hospitality to offer bread to a guest, no matter how late in the evening. Although many homes would have used up their day's bread by nightfall, in a small village people would know who still had bread left over. In modern villages of that region, bread might last for several days, but one must serve a guest a fresh, unbroken loaf as an act of hospitality. After the long walk, these disciples would be hungry anyway.

But by giving thanks and giving bread to them, Jesus takes the role usually held by the head of the household, which he had exercised among his disciples. This is a reminder of the last meal He had with them. It was only then that their eyes were opened and that they recognized him. Although it was late and dangerous to travel, they could not keep this big news that Jesus was indeed raised to themselves. They immediately left for Jerusalem, despite the fact that they were most probably tired and ready for their beds! What devoted witnesses they became!

Imagine if we can have same zeal as those two people who walked with Jesus and who realised that He was the resurrected Lord. I think we can become so "complacent" when celebrating the Lord's supper, as if it is just another ritual among many other rituals in our day to day existence. I wonder who many of us really have the same sensation of "our hearts burning" when we take part in His Holy meal remembering what Jesus has done for us. I wonder of us would do what the two men of Emmaus did, after a long, long, walk going back in the dark to Jerusalem just because they could nae keep it longer for themselves. I mean this is dedication and commitment.

What do we usually do after we have experienced the Lord's presence through communion?

Do we go out of the church running to tell someone else outside the church what we have experienced or do we just continue with our conversations that started before the service began? Do we deliberately go out and think of all our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and all our friends to tell them of the hope that is burning in us of a new future made possible by the resurrection and salvation of Jesus Christ?

And maybe this is our problem. So often we lack the effort and commitment of the two travelers on the way to Emmaus. We do need to say more about what Christ has done for us for everyone to hear. WE MUST end the complacency in us to think that the celebration of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension through Holy Communion is just another ordinary meal.

We must focus on what it really mean for us because if it doesnae mean anything at all, we cannae take part in it. If we do not see and experience the peace and presence of the Lord, then we must not eat from the bread and drink from the grape juice. Then we must restrain ourselves. But we must not restrain ourselves if we think we are not worthy enough or not good enough or important enough or lacking in faith. We come to the Lord's table not because we are saints or think we are Holy. We come because God declared us righteous through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We come because we are redeemed sinners, who is totally and utterly corrupt without the grace and mercy of God.

We come because we need to "refocus" our faith. We come because God is present here through visible elements like bread and grape juice. We have come because it is the only place where we can be ourselves, without any masks because the Lord knows our hearts inside out. We come because He is the Only one who can warm our hearts and give us faith, hope and love.

May we commit ourselves to run out here this morning and blether about His presence and our warmed hearts. And yes, may we focus then on His love, forgiveness and mercy everywhere we go.

Amen