

**SERMON: 26 April 2020 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

**Reading: 1 Peter 1:17-23 and Luke 24:13-35**

The Lord is strength to his people, a safe refuge for his anointed one  
(Psalm 28:8)

Let us pray,  
Early in the morning  
When the sun was rising  
Near the garden tomb  
Mary met the one who knows her name.  
Life-giving God  
We worship you.

*Early in the morning  
When the sun has risen  
Near the worn graves stones in the rose garden  
The spring blossoms and the stillness  
We find the one who calls us by our names.  
Jesus, Son of God  
We come to worship you.*

For the Son is risen  
And life comes out of death  
And love overcomes fear.  
And there is a new world  
Everything looks the same  
But everything is different.  
The familiar and the certain have passed away with the darkness  
And beyond the old stone walls a new path is waiting.

*Come among us now with your life-giving spirit and renew us.  
Come to the people in their homes around us  
Come to the people of the city  
To the hungry, To the homeless,  
To the stranger, To the bereaved.*

Take us into the fragile and broken places  
Take us out from the garden  
With the message of the gospel  
For you are not only with us here  
You are waiting for us there.

*Living God,  
your Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread:*

*open the eyes of our faith,  
that we may see him in all his redeeming work  
to the glory of God the Father.*

### **Reflection 1**

What a changed man Peter became. He was the one who denied three times that he knew Jesus. When Jesus was going through his darkest hour, Simon Peter was disowning Jesus, pretending he didn't know him.

But Jesus had prayed for Peter. At the last supper he took him aside and said, Simon, Simon, I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail (Luke 22:31).

What, that his faith should not fail? Surely this denial was catastrophic failure at its best.

But Jesus must have seen something beyond and above human failure.

He assures Simon Peter that a day will come when he will be in a position to strengthen and build up his brothers and sisters in faith.

Hence we have Peter's letters in the New Testament. Letters which are there to encourage us to follow the way of Christ and live in the grace of God.

Peter knew what it was like to live through dark and difficult times. He writes from Rome, what he calls Babylon, a foreign place of exile, with barbaric practices and horrendous poverty, injustice and inequality for many.

Church tradition tells us that Peter was crucified by the Emperor Nero in 64AD in Rome and that Peter insisted in being crucified upside down so as not to take away from the crucifixion of Jesus.

Peter's faith certainly helped turn the Roman Empire upside down because it helped bring people's lives the right way up. Faith in the crucified and risen Jesus helps people to see above and beyond present circumstances to rise above, to lift your eyes beyond, and to live in the power of resurrection.

Every day is followed by a night and every night is followed by a new day. Darkness is in every day but light follows. In the same way, death and resurrection are part and parcel of our daily lives.

Peter would want to encourage us all today, to live through this pandemic by lifting our eyes above, as Christ has done, and is now doing in you and in me, by faith.

Christ, who was chosen before the creation of the world. In other words, God's plan from the beginning included the possibility of God's suffering with us and the

certainty of God's being with us in it all, and to look beyond present circumstances in a way of life that is growing from imperishable seed.

Those who look to Christ have died in the ground with him but are rising with him in newness of life.

The place to put your faith and your hope today, is in this God, who is the Father who loves us as his precious, precious children, and who walks with us as the Risen Christ.

## **Reflection 2**

Talking about walking connects with this passage where the Risen Jesus meets the two disciples on the road as they walk.

Notice right away, that the two disciples are heading in the wrong direction. What are they doing going to Emmaus when the Lord had told them not to leave Jerusalem until the Father had sent what he promised - the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4)?

Christ meets us even when we're heading in the wrong direction.

He gets along side us on the road of life. He is with us in our grief, in our sadness, in our despair, in our wonderings, in everything.

Christ has come to us, not simply to fix all our problems, but to be one with us in everything.

I can't stress that enough. God with us really means God is with us. Immanuel really means what it means, God with us, always and forever.

Even in suffering.

Jesus has to correct the disciples thinking that suffering was a necessary part of the God anointed life he lived.

Wasn't it clearly predicted by the prophets that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things BEFORE entering his time of glory? (Luke 24:26).

Suffering precedes glory.

Suffering opens up and softens the heart.

It teaches us patience.

When we're at the end of our rope, we're no longer relying on our own resources, or our own strength and are forced to surrender to new ways of coping.

Christ shows us that suffering can be the gateway into better things.

We will get through this time of suffering best if we open up to the reality of Christ with us.

With us, in the every day acts of our lives.

With us in the breaking of bread, in the sharing of meals together, in the giving of one another to each other.

With us, in the laying down of our lives.

With us, in the letting go of our need to control things.

With us, in the love that we discover we have for all things.

With us in the Scriptures and with us in the presence of one another.

With us on the road.

With us in the fire that burns within.

With us in making all things new, even through this time of suffering for so many.

Now we see things imperfectly. The day will come when we see face to face.

Now we know things dimly. Then we will know things with perfect clarity.

God's love never fails.

## **Prayer 2**

Accept O Lord the offering we seek to make, of ourselves and of our money;  
And grant that we may ever work and pray to build a world of peace and joy and freedom,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Loving God, through the presence of the Risen Lord Jesus you met with those early disciples as they walked along the path. We thank you God, our Father, that you meet us on the journeys of life. Often still, in unexpected places and at unexpected times, you can appear. Thank you for the Spirit's grace that allows us to recognise you as you give yourself to the world.

As the sun was rising the risen Jesus stood at the water's edge

Soon to speak with his friends  
Soon to take these sad and disappointed souls  
And casting their nets to the right side  
Bring home a catch and such a catch  
That there was enough and plenty for all  
Worthy of a celebration, a feast

As the sun rises Jesus comes to meet us  
And we give thanks for the encounters with him  
That have shaped and moulded who we are  
Times that have cast light over troubled waters  
Moments when a word, a thought  
Allowed us to dream new dreams and discover a vision  
So for the wonders of faith we give thanks

As the sun rises we gather to praise God Creator, Son and Spirit  
Three in one to make, renew and refresh us  
In the worship we offer  
In our work in the world, at home, at play In the quiet moments of our rest  
And so we praise God

Each new day we return to what we know  
Like fishermen gone back to their nets  
Seeking to make sense of the world and our place within it  
And if we look carefully we glimpse the sun rising  
And see you stand at the water's edge  
Waiting to wade in with us into our daily life  
And so to make all the difference

As the sun rises  
May we see you in the worship that is the living of our lives  
May we recognise you in other souls  
Sense you in the music  
Breathe you through the prayers  
Hear your voice in the scripture  
And respond to your words of wisdom

As the sun rises  
On a world with too many conflicts  
May the wounded and afraid  
With the violent and hate-filled  
Catch sight of you at the edge of the battlefield  
Listen to your voice, recognise your scars  
And discover a passion for peace

As the sun rises

On famine, drought, cities and plains empty and barren  
Or where the rain never stops and flood waters rise  
May the needy, the hungry, those fleeing for dry land  
See you as the tide turns  
And know that you have come to share their plight  
And call humanity to respond

As the sun rises  
You stand at the water's edge  
Outside the gates of the city  
By the wall that divides neighbour from neighbour  
In the corner of the market place  
In the garden or gleaning at the edge of the field  
And still in some quiet corner of our hearts  
God grant to us a catch  
The fullness of life  
The enriching of faith  
For each and all  
By whatever edge we gather  
For the sake of Him who loves us Christ our Lord

As the sun rises, on those we know who are in need of prayer  
May the rays of your heavenly light, alight upon them  
Bringing them hope and healing  
May your plan to prosper all, come to them.

As the sun rises on your Church  
May your Body display your likeness – wounds and all – that all peoples will come to  
see you and know your saving love for them.  
Guide us, in all that we do together in Christ's name  
To honour you and glorify you forever.

### **Blessing**

Risen Christ,  
you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:  
strengthen us to proclaim your risen life  
and fill us with your peace,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Dear sisters and brothers, remain in the love of Christ.  
And may the blessing of God be with you all  
now and forever.  
Amen.