

## **A SERMON FOR EASTERTIDE;**

### **“WERE NOT OUR HEARTS BURNING WITHIN US?”**

(A sermon based on Luke 24 13-35: The Walk to Emmaus)

Over the iconic Shankly Gates of Anfield Football Stadium, home of Liverpool Football Club, as you pass through and look up you read the words “You’ll never walk alone”.

Originally taken from the musical Carousel, the song’s association with the club began when a version by local Liverpool band Gerry & The Pacemakers reached number one in the UK singles chart back in 1963. In the musical the words, bring much comfort after a tragedy. For Liverpool Football Club they have done the same in the years following the Hillsborough disaster of 1989, when almost a hundred Liverpool fans were crushed to death at Sheffield Wednesday’s Hillsborough Stadium.

Do you remember how this very song accompanied the journey of grieving fans, each step in the long battle for justice for bereaved relatives and hundreds of injured and traumatised survivors? They discovered that they were not alone, because strangers, politicians, celebrities and countless unnamed and unknown people rallied round to support them in their grief.

Tragedy has also struck in the Gospel reading from Luke. Two of the wider group of disciples are walking towards Emmaus, fleeing Jerusalem and the apparent loss of someone they loved. They are “Talking and Discussing,” ruminating in their hearts and minds, going over and over the dreadful events of previous days. We too currently may be going over the dreadful events of previous days,

with the current Coronavirus Pandemic affecting so many people. The disciples here on the Emmaus Road are clearly in a state of bewilderment, loss and grief. To a lesser or larger extent, we find ourselves traveling a very similar road, for at the very least we are grieving the loss of our normal routines, our normal patterns of contact, our normal ways of gathering together, our normal ways of worshipping God. It is doubly painful, living in this contactless world where many are physically grieving the death of a loved one or preparing for such an event.

The followers of Jesus had indeed fixed all their hope upon him, but here on the road to Emmaus they are traumatised having witnessed Christ's arrest so quickly, followed by brutal crucifixion.

Here, on the road to Emmaus they are also having to process new stories, new information, strange stories, rumours of an empty tomb. Completely heartbroken, they are struggling to make sense of things, as no doubt you and I are currently struggling to make sense of the strange times we find ourselves in.

Into their complete fragmentation steps Christ, the Risen Saviour. Into our complete fragmentation steps Christ, the Risen Saviour.

Stories of a stranger arriving to heal and restore a situation are mirrored elsewhere in Scripture. The experience of Hagar in the desert, Genesis 16; the visit of God to Abraham in Genesis 18 and the appearance of the angel of the Lord to the parents of Samson in Judges 13; are among many that can be cited. The Greek legend of Romulus, also holds together some of the key aspects of the stranger coming along side offering hope.

Jesus, our Lord on the Emmaus Road offers so much more than hope, although hope in dark places is always a good place to start.

Jesus is offering Cleopas and friend a complete transformation of their lives. True it is when breaking the bread, their eyes are first opened; and yes, the supper at Emmaus is so evocative of Holy Communion. But it is in sharing the meal that they are taken back to the road. They are taken back to the need to reflect deeply upon life and all its encounters.

On the road to Emmaus in the midst of very confusing and dark days steps Jesus and they recall even before they could articulate the words of the Lords living presence, their hearts were burning within them. This is the work of Gods Holy Spirit, it reminds us that we, even in the midst of heartache, are already together in the company of Jesus on the road to Pentecost. It also reminds us, does it not, that Wesley's heart was strangely warmed. Unable to take communion physically together at the moment, in reflection, on this particular passage, at this time, we do well to concentrate on the experience on the road in which hearts are strangely warmed by the presence of Christ. It is without the physical breaking of bread and is beyond the experience of human physical touch, because it is internal, it is within us.

In these days and in these times do not lose hope, Jesus is on the road alongside; in the midst of grief, he bears and carries as ever. We are learning new ways of recognising him; we like Wesley can know the power within, of the heart that is strangely warmed with love.

I am glad that Liverpool Football Club have adopted such a wonderful song of hope and if I might take the liberty to slightly paraphrase it. "Walk on, Walk on, with Christ in your heart and you'll never walk alone".

Amen.

Rev'd Diane April 2020