



Luke 24:13 - 35

FOUND

These past weeks we have missed each other's company. It is good to be with friends who support us and validate us and make us comfortable. Many of us love being part of the Sunday service and its familiar songs and rituals. During this pandemic, some of us have felt lost. I know there have been times that I have. Familiar routines and connections sustain us. Speaking to people this past week, even those who enjoyed the novelty of being home at first, are now over it.

Many of you are dealing with disappointments: These past weeks in our community there have been postponed weddings and delayed baptisms and cancelled birthday parties, and people waiting for surgery and medical treatments. Today would have been the celebration of White Sunday or Fakame for our Tongan children and their families – a huge highlight of any other year. Some folk have lost work while Year 12 students feel cheated as they try to keep up their studies and dream of the special moments of graduation and formals, long planned holidays have been cancelled, and families and teachers face an uncertain and confusing school term. Usually when we experience a crisis we come together and share food and drink and talk and offer comfort - this is a strange year.

The story of the two disciples journeying home with their broken dreams and disappointment after Jesus was crucified and how they **had hoped** that Jesus would be the one to save their people, has always emotionally connected with me – but especially now.

Perhaps it is simply that we can imagine their slumped shoulders as they trudge home with stories that resonate with our own stories of lost dreams, or disappointment, of feeling bereft or lost in these times.

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Perhaps it is how they seem to have been so preoccupied with their own thoughts and feelings that they do not see that it is Jesus who walks beside them and listens to their sad story. There have been times when I am so preoccupied that my family say: Where are you Mum? You did not hear anything we have been saying! Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus that day, do we also get so preoccupied that we miss the story?

It was of course in the midst of sharing that table hospitality together that we do miss right now when Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them - when they held bread in their hands that memories were prodded and they recognized Jesus had been with them the whole time.

“Were not our hearts burning within us when he was talking to us on the road, when he was opening the scriptures to us? **The Lord has risen indeed!**”

I believe that this year the coronavirus pandemic reminds us of something which is very clear in the Gospel stories of Jesus’ resurrection:

On Easter morning those who came looking for Jesus did not find him where they expected to find him in the tomb. The living Christ came looking for them – In John’s Gospel Jesus surprised Mary Magdalene as she wept in front of the empty tomb in the garden – the risen Lord surprised the disciples hiding in fear behind closed doors – In the midst of his questions and doubts, Thomas was surprised a week later –

while they were home fishing in Galilee, Peter was surprised by Jesus on the beach - Paul was travelling to Damascus to arrest Christians when he was literally knocked off his horse and blinded by a vision of the risen Christ. And here two disciples are surprised in the midst of all their questions and disappointment along the road and then in their home at the dinner table.

We talk about coming to Jesus and yet here Jesus our risen Lord comes to us and that is very exciting in our current situation. In this story it is through the reading of the scriptures and when they shared the hospitality of bread and the cup inside their own home separated from the other disciples as we are today that Cleopas and his companion encountered the risen Christ.

Of course they raced back to share the good news with their friends in Jerusalem and together they rejoiced and encouraged each other - but today we are reminded that **Jesus meets us where we are** even when we cannot be physically together – and even when we are lost along the way.

Symbols are powerful. We saw that last weekend when local communities gathered with candles at 6am on what became a very special Anzac Day in the midst of the coronavirus season.

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There's a story about Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the great Russian author who spent many years in a gulag in Siberia. After long suffering in the work camp, he fell into despair. Like other prisoners, he had worked in the fields day after day, in snow, rain and sun. His days were filled with backbreaking labor and slow starvation and loneliness. On a particular day, the hopelessness of his situation became too much. He thought that the rest of his life was meaningless since he would most likely die in this Siberian prison. So he gave up.

Laying his shovel on the ground, he slowly walked to a crude work-site bench and sat down. He knew that at any moment a guard would order him to stand up, and when he failed to respond, the guard would beat him to death. He had seen it happen to many other prisoners.

As he waited, head down, he felt a presence. Slowly, he lifted his eyes and saw a skinny, old prisoner squat down next to him. The man said nothing. Instead, he drew a stick through the ground at Solzhenitsyn's feet, tracing the sign of the Cross. The man then got back up and returned to his work.



As Solzhenitsyn stared at the sign of the Cross, he remembered that there was something greater than the evil that he saw in the prison, something greater than the Soviet Union.

Solzhenitsyn slowly got up, picked up his shovel, and went back to work. Nothing outward had changed, but inside, he received hope.

Solzhenitsyn was lost in a dark place somewhere in Siberia, but I believe Jesus came to him through the cross drawn by the skinny old man. Empowered and strengthened by the cross and the Christ whose resurrection overcame death and the power of the Roman Empire, Solzhenitsyn trusted the grace of God. He survived the gulag and went on to write his books and to play his part in the history of his nation.

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It is my experience that it is often in the times along the journeys of our lives when we have lain awake troubled with questions and doubts – when we have felt lost as our lives lose their rhythm - when we have been disillusioned and disappointed or despondent that the risen Jesus comes looking for us.

We cannot box Jesus – he seeks us out and reminds us too that we are part of this bigger story that he explained to the two on the road to Emmaus and that Alexander Solzhenitsyn remembered as he looked at that cross in the dirt. Jesus isn't far away from any one of us wherever we are – however our life is disrupted - whether we are together or apart and scattered.

One of the questions being asked frequently during this COVID-19 season is what will our world be like when all this over? The same question is being asked about the church: What are we learning along the way that will change the way we do church? These are important questions.



But this I do know: At the centre of who we are and what we do, Jesus shows up in the words of scripture and in the bread and wine of communion to strengthen us along the journey.

Jesus came to Cleopas and his companion on the road, and not the other way around. The good news is that whatever happens and wherever we are, we are never beyond his reach. And today you are invited to the sacred meal we will eat here in the church and in your homes not by me, but by the living Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Here the risen Christ comes to us and feeds us for our journey with his very body in the broken bread and the cup of his grace and mercy.

Jesus Christ's resurrection means new life for us forever. But until that day when we feast with him in eternity, he seeks us out. Wherever we are in a world that is changing, Jesus finds us. And the question becomes: Are we ready to be found?

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