

Church at home

East Leake Methodist Church 3rd after Easter A 26.4.2020

Sit comfortably in a quiet place and prepare, start with a brief period of silence, turning your mind and spirit towards God. You may want to have a cross or candle in view as a focus.

Opening sentences

One thing I have asked of the Lord,
this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life;
to behold the beauty of the Lord
and to seek Him in His temple.

Call Who is it that you seek?

Response We seek the Lord our God.

Call Do you seek Him with all your heart?

Response Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Call Do you seek Him with all your soul?

Response Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Call Do you seek Him with all your mind?

Response Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Call Do you seek Him with all your strength?

Response Amen. Christ, have mercy.

Hymn StF 353 Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it

Opening Prayer

Living God,
with joyful hearts we praise you,
for you have destroyed the power of death
and opened the way to life.
With humble hearts we acclaim you,
for you have vanquished evil,

good refusing to be denied.
With grateful hearts we acknowledge you,
for you have turned defeat into victory,
ends into new beginnings.
With reverent hearts we honour you,
for you have changed our lives for ever,
making this and every day a celebration of Easter.
Living God,
for the triumph you achieved,
and the victory you go on achieving,
we magnify your holy name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Reading: Luke 24:13-35

Address

In August 1939 two German archaeologists were hurriedly completing their excavation of a cave site just outside the city of Ulm. War was coming and they had both been called up. The cave they had been excavating had been the home of a group of early modern humans at the time of the last ice age, 40,000 years ago. On the last afternoon they hurriedly mapped a small chamber at the rear of the cave. They didn't expect to find anything, the cave was small and dark and unlikely to have been part of the living space. To their surprise they found numerous fragments of the tip of a mammoth tusk that had been handcrafted. They scooped the fragments up into a bag, labelled it, and took it back to the museum, and then went to war. Thirty years later the curator of the Ulm museum decided to look at the bag of fragments with a colleague. To their surprise they found that they could be put together like a 3D jigsaw. When they did so this is what emerged.



The curators were aware that modern humans showed great artistic skill in their cave paintings and carvings because they had closely observed the world around them and the animals in it, on which they depended for food. But this was something different. It had been carved with great skill, taking over 40 hours of careful work. It showed an intimate knowledge of the mammoth ivory from which it had been carved. The hollow centre of the mammoth tusk had been used when carving the legs of the figure, and the way that the figure seemed to lean forward was the result of the natural curve of the tip of the tusk. This had been no casual whittling a piece of ivory during dark winter months when the temperature would fall to -30° C. And the figure had been handled by lots of people who had almost rubbed it smooth in places.

What made it unique was that it showed very accurately carved head of a cave lion which was common in Ice Age Europe and was about 1/3 as big again as an African lion, on the body of what was very obviously a man. This was not something that could be seen in the real world – this was something from the imagination of human beings 40,000 years ago. This was an insight into the spiritual world of those people – this was an image of their God. Once the curators had realised that, they experienced an “wow” moment – point of revelation, when they suddenly realised what it was that they were looking at. The “lion man” has now become one of the most remarkable finds from the period of the Ice Age. Its central importance in the spiritual life of the peoples of those times was confirmed when close excavations of the caves in and around the site discovered little amulets of the lion man threaded so that they could be hung around the neck – rather as we Christians might hang across around our necks to show that we are believers.

The followers of Jesus on the Emmaus Road had one of those “wow” moments when they suddenly realised who it was that they had been talking to. When Jesus broke the bread – with all the meaning that had for the early Christians remembering the events of the Easter Passover – the two followers had a flash of revelation, and they suddenly understood and believed.

We don't know exactly who these two followers were. We know that one of them is called Cleopas – which was not one of Jesus's disciples, and because he has a Greek name, he may have been a “God Fearer” – someone who follow the Jewish faith but was not a Jew. He may have come from the area to the east of the Sea of Galilee which was a Greek speaking area that Jesus sometimes visited. We don't know who the other follower was – though the story that we find in Luke is so packed with detail and personal reflections it seems likely that Luke got it “from the horse's mouth” – or from a source very close to the individual who had been with Cleopas on that day. They were strongly associated with the disciples, because they were aware of the stories that the women had brought from the tomb that morning. But the way that Cleopas and his friend told the story made it clear that they considered this to be incredible. The story that they told about Jesus was one of disappointed expectations. They had hoped that Jesus would have been the Prophet that they were looking for – the Messiah who was expected. The popular belief was that the Messiah would draw together the two centres of power in the Jewish faith – the King of the line of David, and the High Priest. The history of the Jews had seen both high offices debased. Herod the Great and his sons had usurped the power of the king, theirs was a dysfunctional family that fought each other and collaborated with the hated Romans who had taken over in Judaea. The high priesthood had been sold to the highest bidder in the past, and those in charge of the Temple worship were just as much in the pocket of the Romans as were the kings. They had hoped that Jesus would be the Messiah who would put an end to all of this and usher in a religious and political reformation for the Jewish people.

But it had all gone wrong. And so this stranger who they had met on the seven-mile trip to Emmaus had talked to them about their misunderstanding. We tend to concentrate in the story of the followers on the way to Emmaus with the very end – when Jesus reveals himself – but the real change that takes place in the story is the way that the followers come to understand that what they saw as a disaster is actually part of God's long-term plan. They began to see that what was written in the Law and the Prophets pointed to a Redeemer who was bound to suffer. The resurrection was not, as they had thought when they set out, to be some fantastical story which showed that the women who followed Jesus had become hysterical – after all, who believed the evidence of a woman unsupported by a man. Surely the evidence of the two disciples, Peter and John, who had seen that the body had been moved and were now suggesting that Jesus had risen from the dead showed that in their grief over the death of Jesus they had basically lost the plot. The resurrection they now realised was not some fairy-tale to keep hope alive, but a reality which showed that God's plan was

working – it became a cause for hope, and not “whistling in the dark” to keep courage alive. When they realised that it was Jesus that have been talking to them it merely acted to confirm what they had already experienced as their “hearts burned within them”.

They had started out believing that the stories of the resurrection were a problem; they ended their journey by realising that it was an answer. In the same way for us as we meet Christ, or rather Christ meets us, God reveals to us who Christ is. The resurrection is not something that we are asked to believe even though it seems incredible, it’s something that we conclude is true because all the evidence points to its truth. Jesus continues to make his presence known to us, just as he made his presence known to his followers on the Emmaus road, and to the disciples. We find the presence of Jesus when we are “gathered together” in Christ’s name. In present circumstances we cannot physically be as close to each other as we would wish. But there is a long tradition in religious faith, including the Christian faith, that our individual prayers are joined with the prayers of other Christians even though we are apart. There is a famous painting by Millet called *The Angelus*. This is what it’s like.



It shows a man and wife who have been digging potatoes in a field – hard and dirty work. But when they hear the Angelus bell rung at 6 o’clock in the evening from the local church – seen in the background – they stop work to offer a prayer. They do so in the knowledge that all those who heard the bell have also stopped to offer a prayer. They are not called to go to the church, but each person stopping at the same time makes a congregation. So when we offer our prayers this morning together, we may be apart, but we are united.

The story of the road to Emmaus reminds us that we also meet Jesus through Scripture, by reading and interpretation as it is shown to us by the power of the Holy Spirit which makes our “hearts burn within us”. We meet Jesus when we break bread together in the Holy Communion. We can’t do that at present, but we look forward in hope to the time when we can. We meet Jesus as we meet each other and speak to each other about the place of Christ in our lives. After all, the two followers on the

road to Emmaus did not stay there when they realised that Jesus had been with them – despite the late hour they immediately rushed back to tell the disciples of their experience. And finally, we can meet Christ in strangers, particularly those who are in need and distress, when practical and spiritual help can often reveal through them the ever present presence of the resurrected Christ reminding us even in the face of death there is still hope.

Pause for thought

Meet us, risen Lord,
so that, incredible though your resurrection may seem,
we may know you for ourselves
and share your life,
now and for evermore.

Amen.

Hymn StF 307 On the day of resurrection (Try singing it to the tune Stuttgart - "Come thou long expected Jesus")

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Lord Jesus Christ,
the disciples failed at first to believe in the empty tomb,
dismissing it as so much nonsense,
and we too are hesitant to believe sometimes,
fearful of indulging in wishful thinking,
in what seems too good to be true.
The Apostle Thomas refused to accept you had truly risen,
insisting he would not accept it until he could see you for himself,
touch and feel your wounds,
and we too struggle with doubt,
questions to which we cannot find answers.
Your followers on the Emmaus road
and Mary in the garden
failed to recognise you though you stood by their side,
and our eyes too can be closed to your living presence,
here with us now.
Yet you greeted the disciples in the upper room,
you showed yourself to Thomas,

you spoke to Mary
and you made yourself known through bread and wine.
Across the centuries you have likewise met with your people,
guiding, nurturing and inspiring through your Spirit.
You have changed history,
changed lives,
changed us.
Thank you.
Amen.

Prayer of Intercession

Walk with us, Lord, on our journey of faith,
both as individuals and as the Church of God;
open up to us the truths you long for us to understand,
and inspire all who teach and encourage.
Equip us all to pass on the good news of Easter.

Silence

Lord God:
abide with us.

Walk with us, Lord, down the streets
of our cities, towns and villages,
drive with us down the motorways
and fly with us down the air corridors.
Meet all those who are curious, searching,
or moving in the wrong direction.
Let your presence be sought
and recognised in all the world.

Silence

Lord God:
abide with us.

Walk with us, Lord, in our life journeys,
guiding, teaching and correcting us, as we learn the lessons of loving
in our homes, our work and our communities.

Silence

Lord God:

abide with us.

Walk with us, Lord,
through the times of suffering and pain,
alerting us to one another's needs
and providing for us in whatever ways are best for us.
Help us to trust you through the dark times;
breathe new life and hope
into those who are close to despair.

Silence

Lord God:

abide with us.

Walk with us, Lord, through the valley of death;
may our love and prayers support those
who walk that journey today.
Draw close to them and welcome them
into the joy of heaven.

Silence

Lord God:

abide with us.

Lord, we thank you for walking with us wherever we travel,
We thank you that you are indeed real and alive every step of the way!

Merciful Father, accept these prayers on the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ, who taught us when we pray to say.....

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn StF 594 Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
go with us in the daily round of life.
Continue to speak to us,
teaching us more of your way.
Continue to bless us,
bringing joy out of sorrow,
hope out of despair.
Continue to nurture,
guide,
comfort
and support,
offering a light to our path in our journey through life.
Lord Jesus Christ,
continue to amaze us through who and what you are.
Amen.