

St George's Eastergate; Easter 3...26th April 2020.

Some people may be asking, although I haven't heard any...have you?, how on earth can Christian faith be relevant in times like these? I understand the complexity of the situation we are now facing and the grief which may cause so many to ask such a question..BUT..so far I have not heard anyone say such a thing. What people ARE saying and praying is exactly what we find in today's Collect "Lord give us such knowledge of His presence with us, that we may be strengthened and sustained..." People, including us, are turning to God and saying what help is there for us in all this...is there any meaning in it all?

The story I have just read from Luke's Gospel is in a very real sense a model story. A model story of how people encounter God in very difficult and often tragic circumstances....from that day until this!

In the story we see two people trudging home from Jerusalem after tragic and extraordinary events which they are totally confused by. It seemed that everybody in Jerusalem was aware of these events. It seems that these two had heard from people who had gone to Jesus' tomb and they also knew that the

apostles did not believe the women when they returned and said what the angels had told them. Think how things had changed by the time Peter spoke boldly to the crowds...the story in our epistle today...when he spoke with the absolute assurance that God had raised Jesus from the dead!

But that was later; this was still only the third day after the crucifixion These two had horrific memories and wild rumours ringing in their ears. They were just like us; walking along side by side is often a time when we confide our hopes and fears to each other isn't it!

Note how Jesus drew alongside them in their struggles with faith: how he coaxes all their fears and doubts out of them; and how at this stage they did not recognise him. He was already in his risen form. It is often the same today; we often don't immediately recognise Jesus talking to us when we are full of doubt and fear...we have to spill it all out to him.

Note how gently Jesus explains the Jewish scriptures; how he explained that for centuries they had been looking towards these very times and events; how through their knowledge of God's

salvation history they would slowly come to recognise God's plan for His world...how He had always planned to rescue His people through suffering and not from suffering. The eyes of these two gradually began to be opened through exploring the scriptures with Jesus.

But in the end it was not because of what Jesus said that they came to recognise the whole truth; it was because of what he did. We read that when he made as if to part company from them they "urged him strongly" to stay for the night and eat with them. They were reluctant for this encounter to end. It was then, when they shared a meal together that the truth fully dawned. Already they had said to each other that their hearts had "burned within us" when he was speaking to them but when he broke the bread and blessed it and gave it to them they recognised that it was the same Jesus who had shared bread with them the night before he died. Jesus then vanished and they rushed back to Jerusalem to share with the others that they had met with Jesus...he had indeed risen from death. The story of people encountering Jesus after his resurrection was gaining momentum and a few weeks later we find the

situation we heard in the Epistle when 3,000 people came to believe.

I started by saying that this story is a model of how people encounter Jesus..it is. Each time we meet together to share our common experience of Jesus we read the scriptures, where we hear of God's salvation history, and we remind ourselves of Jesus' words as he shared that first Eucharistic meal with his followers. We are doing that today and every Sunday so that we can encounter the risen Christ in the midst of our present circumstances. Virtually is the only way we can do it at the moment but it can still open our eyes.

I humbly suggest that it might very well be a good idea to use this story as the focus for meditation this coming week...to inhabit the story for ourselves and to expect to encounter the risen Lord.

Those early disciples expected nothing. They were depressed and confused, but Jesus came alongside them anyway and revealed himself...He still does this today. God is creating His new world and people who recognise Him in it...this story models how.

ALLELUIA, CHRIST IS RISEN, AMEN.