

Easter 3: Annual Meeting and Emmaus Road - travelling on with Jesus Acts 2.14a,36-41; Lk 24.13-35

(Part one of AGM address)

We live in turbulent times. Turbulent in the world. Turbulent in the life of this community, in our Cathedral and Diocese, with many departures and arrivals. For some, perhaps many of us, turbulent in our own lives. Sometimes it can be hard to find a sense of the shape of what's taking place, as we are buffeted by world events or the changes and chances of personal fortune. As I write this, I'm aware that the turbulence that's front and centre in my own mind is negligible compared to what many others are facing ... but nonetheless, it's real.

Today is a day to take stock. It's a day to take stock in the life of the Cathedral, and some - I hope many - of us will be gathering immediately after coffee to review last year and commit ourselves for all that's to come, in our annual general meeting. This address this morning gives me an opportunity to begin to say some of the things I would otherwise say in the meeting, which I trust will ring bells with the wider community gathered today. It's also a day to day stock in our liturgical year, as we reflect with the disciples on the road to Emmaus on all that's happened, with the help of Jesus.

Many of us will have heard this account of the walk to Emmaus many times. We know the lines about, "our hearts burning as he talked to us", or, "have you not heard what the chief priests and the leaders of the people have done." And we are familiar with the sense of betrayal and despair felt by the two downhearted disciples as they trudge out of the city - a sense of hopelessness and helplessness, caught up in the personal impact of decisions taken by people way above their pay grade. It all sounds so familiar in our experience of the world.

What I've been shown in the passage as I have come to it again this year, is the importance of remembering, and allowing our remembering to be guided by scripture and sacrament. The glories of Easter day are almost too much to take in at the time it happens - and certainly in the half sleep of the dawn service. The transformation of the world implied by the resurrection takes time to sink in. Just like the disciples on the road, we need the help of the Holy Spirit to bring to mind all that we have been taught about Jesus, and help us see its relevance here and now - to catch the shape of everything God was and is doing in the world. The confusion of what had just happened on that first Easter - the triumph and excitement of Palm Sunday and all that followed in the early days of that week in Jerusalem, confronting the authorities and being celebrated by the people, the intimacy of the Supper on Thursday, the tragedy of Friday and Jesus' crucifixion, the emptiness of Saturday and then the blaze of light of Easter was all too much. It was too much to take in as it was happening. What they needed was the perspective given by the walk, and then the insight given by God, who was able first to conceal Jesus from them, and then to reveal him to them.

Our first reading anticipated the day of Pentecost, by which time Peter, with the help of the Holy Spirit, was able to speak confidently about everything that had happened, and call 3000 people to faith. But that's still in the future. Today - Easter evening in the scripture, still only two weeks later in our church calendar - that's all still to come. Today, we are still trying to make sense of it all. It's never possible to know just what's going on until we look back, when we are able to discern, and understand, and by God's grace draw on that understanding to find hope for the future.

As we look back over this last year - and for me, if I'm honest, these last thirteen years that I've been travelling with you in Coventry, there is much to look back on. Today, as the city reels with the excitement of promotion, we might look back on the part we played twelve years ago in getting the Sky Blues back into the city to play their matches. I look back on the journey we've shared together to keep the Cathedral open in the face of extreme financial pressures and the way we were able to take out the admission charge, both with the help of many partners both within and beyond the immediate Cathedral community, especially in the City and the wider Diocese. I look back on the continued growth of the reconciliation ministry both here and across the world - CCN has grown from 150 to nearly 300 — I've visited 100 centres, taking crosses to almost 40. The

congregation has changed - we've lost many members, but seen many join, especially younger members in St. Clare's and the Phoenix club. We've seen a huge growth in our arts and events programme, and with it a tremendous growth in our sense of partnership with the city. We've seen the opening of the John Laing Centre, and the ability to improve our hospitality to those who visit. God has been faithful, even in the midst of a world in turmoil.

A lot has happened, even in this past year. We've welcomed a new bishop, Sophie. We've welcomed a new Canon, Kate. We've welcomed an acting director of music, Joe, and welcomed back a new Assistant Director, Liam. And we've welcomed a new head verger, Chris (actually that was this year, not last). Other members of staff who are not usually here on a Sunday have also joined - along with new members of our worshipping community, some of you here this morning. We've seen the Priory Row project to create a mini Cathedral Close move forward, and Canon Nitano and Marc have already moved in. All these happy arrivals have followed departures, and the grief of partings. Our lives move forward.

And here, especially, we know what it means to move forward through the trauma of loss to the dawning hope of resurrection. This is the story we have to share with the world. A way of framing the events that confront nations and individuals which recognises reality but hangs on to hope.

[Forgive me if I say this more than once before I leave, but a number of you have said that I have changed the Cathedral. I'm not so sure I'd put it that way - I think that together we have learned once again what it means to be the Cathedral that God has called us to be. What's also true is that the Cathedral has changed me: being here as Dean has helped me, I believe, be the person God has always called me to be. For both myself and the Cathedral, we are rooted in the work of reconciliation, nourished by the arts, shaped by the peculiarly Anglican way of being a follower of Jesus, serving God and inspired by the Holy Spirit.]

On the Emmaus Road Jesus helps the hopeless disciples understand how God has gone before them and will come after them - and how God can be discovered revealing his patterns to them each time they search for God's word in scripture. He leads them encounter God in the breaking of the bread, just as he will for us this morning. We read in this passage how Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and shares it. That's called in Anglican theological colleges the four fold shape of the Eucharist. It's what we do in communion, with the bread that we share as it becomes the body of Christ for us. But we also sometimes speak of it in terms of what God does with our lives as individuals, and as a community. We say most Sundays, "We are the body of Christ". As we share the body of Christ in the bread of communion, we become the body of Christ in this community. And as we go full circle the circle, we become the body of Christ not only through receiving the bread of communion, but also as we allow ourselves to be taken, blessed, broken and shared with the world. This is a profound truth - not just here in Coventry, but in every Christian community each according to their own context.

Here, it means allowing ourselves to be taken by God each day, to receive God's blessing, but to be ready to be broken as Jesus was by the reality of the world for which he died - then to be shared as fragments of God's love, wherever we find ourselves.

This is our calling, my friends, and it will be my privilege to share it with you for just a few more weeks.

*Now to the one who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. Eph 3. 20,21*