

**Sermon Easter 3 26<sup>th</sup> April 2020 St Paul's  
Archdeacon Graham Knott Luke 24:13-35**

One of the great delights and challenges of children is their eagerness to learn. Question after question pours forth. Why? Why? Why? Why are you doing that? Why do I have to do that? Where is mum or where is dad or where is my little sister or where are my shoes, socks, textas? Can I have something to eat? Can I have more to eat? Why are flowers different colours? Why do we have to stay at home? Why do I still have to do schoolwork at home? Why won't my computer work? How do I work this out?

Questions are vital for discovering God and discovering the risen Christ. You could go so far as to say if you haven't got questions about the Resurrection you've missed Jesus somewhere.

One of the apparently strangest incidents in the Gospels is when Jesus, who has such dazzling wisdom to impart and the life of the kingdom to share, sweeps aside the self-important adults and says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." And I think Jesus loves those innocent questions of children asked from a pure heart. So I think I forgot to grow up when it comes to the post Easter narratives. Every one of them answers some questions but leaves me with even more. Questions such as if Mary wasn't allowed to keep hugging Jesus in the garden because he hadn't ascended to the Father – what is this passing through closed doors and turning up here, there and everywhere that keeps happening? What sort of person does that? And thinking back to last week – Jesus wasn't in the locked room when Thomas made his long statement about unless I see and touch I won't believe. Jesus wasn't there but when he turns up the next week he straightaway speaks with Thomas as if he knew the whole conversation that went on the week earlier. I have questions because it seems to me the key to capturing these moments isn't about coming to terms with the presence of the risen Jesus but his apparent absence that isn't really absence. The disciples are getting used to working with his apparent risen absence not simply the challenge of his presence. But it seems as if he is present, too, when he is absent because he knows things. Describing all of that in some great scrabble words – what is the relationship between the kenosis of Jesus – his self-emptying always described best in the great hymn of Philippians 2 and his omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience that is part of Trinity life? There's prize for anyone who emails me with a photo of a scrabble game with any of those words legitimately on it.

Questions are wonderful because questions are the way to grow. However childlike questioning often fades as we age. There is nothing worse than the person who has all the answers even before the questions are asked. There is nothing worse than someone whose imagination and joy of discovery have died. There is nothing worse than the person who can't see beyond the obvious and demands a rational answer to life's deepest mysteries. But as adults we have learned that a questioning spirit gets us into trouble. 'Are you an idiot?' crushes our self-esteem and joy. Or questions put us on the boundaries with the tag of being a troublemaker and disrupter of tidy solutions. Or questions interfere with relationships because others

don't realise the beauty of discussion. We simply want to talk about the questions and how we feel. We don't need an answer –we need listening responsive space.

It's in the interplay of questions that our faith matures.

And it appears that it is the exploration of questions in the companionship of others which liberates faith in the risen Lord Jesus. We live in a highly individualised society which drives us toward autonomy as being the measure of success. When the touch and presence of others is taken away in enforced isolation we suddenly realise afresh how important companionship is. So in today's Gospel we get this wonderful interplay of questions as two companions walk a lonely and dejected road. Little do they know who joins their journey and asks the simplest of questions. "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" Now I know a lot has changed in the last couple of thousand years but two things remain flashpoints. The one is the person who joins an animated conversation because they want part of the action or to be seen talking with the right people. The second is being Billy no mates and longing to join a conversation going on. In a group I'm a wallflower. I've never tried that Jesus line with strangers – 'What are you guys talking about?' - but I don't think it would get me access to much – a discreet moving away by the other couple usually. Which tells me that these two were totally preoccupied with their sadness. We can become so self-preoccupied that we run the risk of missing signs of life, new birth and hope. What are our conversations about now? What if we resolved not to talk about the social isolation or COVID for one week? What might we be missing because one thing dominates our agenda? Has the risen Jesus drawn alongside in the presence of the Spirit, drawing us from superficial conversations into deeper resurrection realities?

"Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" How easy it is to make assumptions about others when we are self-absorbed. This companion beside them was far from a stranger to Jerusalem in the way they imagined. Jesus knew Jerusalem intimately – it's political intrigue, religious hypocrisy, crowd grooming yet also the place of such salvation history in the heart of God and God's people. Jesus knew the violence that came a person's way when they stood against the corruption of power and sought to include all within the orbit of God's love. He knew that the place of inclusion had become the place of total exclusion and fully experienced that in his own flesh. Yet he was a stranger because his was always the way of the peace, love, forgiveness, life and hope. The two companions had discerned rightly the presence of a stranger who walked with them. Those who walk the way of Christ will find that numbers of their questions arise at the intersection of the world's and God's ways. One disciple would later describe Christians as aliens and strangers in the world. We walk with a different news story – a good news story. When the world speaks of COVID we speak of a risen hope giver and peace sharer.

"We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." Many hopes are swept aside at the moment or redefined – careers, job security, future income from super, cohesion with family and friends. But in the shadows new rumors emerge of hope but not perhaps of the order we expected. The signs were there in the past but hidden beneath the plethora of our expectations and assumptions. We hear of those who astound us, of visions of angels – of rumours of resurrection in the midst of our

focusing on loss. Will we believe there is a new future or try to hold onto what is past?

Then the next question – which sounds rather exasperated – comes. “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” This is probably our biggest question....What is the place of suffering? Why suffering? How can suffering and love walk hand in hand? God’s suffering servant, God’s cross is as far away from our thinking, comprehension and natural choice that we find it totally offensive. The road to life is paved with suffering and jeweled with the scars of a crucified Messiah. And still today we resist the suffering, failing to see the resurrection life beyond it. Always death before resurrection. Always breaking before blessing. The building up in life is always followed by breaking then blessing. To know resurrection life we must know this – that suffering was and remains necessary.

And this companion seems to have such a grasp on being able to interpret the past such that it applies now. What a wonderful gift this is. “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” There are lots of people who can make sense of the past – that’s memories and they are easy to see and often misinterpret. The past is always golden. There are lots of people who can see where they want to get to in the future – that’s vision and easy to see. There are very few who can interpret the past, so that it can have meaning in the present and usher us towards the desired future. That was the companion on the Emmaus Road. Even so at this stage he remains unrecognized. It is only as they break bread together, having strongly encouraged Jesus to stay that they recognize him for who he is. And just as they think they have possessed Jesus and can keep him with them so in his elusiveness he disappears. Once more they must become accustomed not simply to the presence of the risen Jesus but to his absence. But now they have grasped the meaning and with renewed strength and vigour they return to the Upper Room in Jerusalem where the doors are locked for fear of the Jews. Now they have a story to share.

There remains one unanswered question. Why did Luke not tell us what the risen Lord shared from Moses and all the prophets? Wouldn’t it be nice and tidy for us if Luke had written a detailed list of how Jesus understood himself? The Emmaus Road narrative leaves us with questions about the proximity and elusiveness of the Risen Lord in every way.

The narrative closes with our being encouraged to work with our companions, with those who share the Emmaus Road in all its perplexities with us, with those who understand that it’s OK to ask questions, it’s ok to be sad and it’s OK to not have all the answers. We are invited to a voyage of discovery in the Holy Spirit to understand what is said about Jesus in the Scriptures, to draw wisdom from his often undiscerned presence, to share the walk with one another however we are able to do that at this time, and to realize that often when we think Jesus is far away he is alongside us all the time. Above all we are invited to keep questioning and exploring until we come with stunned silence to one glorious final question, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”