

## Easter 3A SFX 2023

### *Emmaus*

Emmaus is perhaps the most vivid and moving of all the Resurrection stories. It is so precisely because it is **the most human**. There are no angels, flags, no trumpets. There are no heroes, there is not even an apostle. Instead, there are two people like you and me walking along the road of life. Luke names one disciple – Cleopas, the other is anonymous, perhaps deliberately so that we can step into his shoes.

You and Cleopas are walking along the road but going the wrong way. You are feeling a bit down, disorientated, having lost a sense of purpose and direction. For Cleopas it was a personal loss, for his ideas of love, justice and freedom were tied up with the person of Jesus and what had happened to him on that Good Friday? For many, separation and loss is the dominant story in their lives. It is the thing hardest to get over. In just a few words Luke captures this sense of forsakenness. We have all been there. We have all been on the Road to Emmaus, we have run away, sought to escape the distress.

You and Cleopas are walking along the road and a stranger comes alongside. With eyes downcast, Cleopas tells his story of lost hope. He had heard a rumour of angels, that the one they loved was still alive. But it hadn't gone down deep.

But this is a tale of two stories. Cleopas tells the story of his disappointment. But the stranger wants to tell a bigger story of how God is true to his word, and all that the prophets dreamed came to pass that first Easter giving the world hope. The stranger takes his story but gives it back to him. But the whole story, the story of Israel, of hope and freedom of a servant Messiah. And their hearts were set afire.

It is what happens at every Mass, don't our hearts burn within us as we hear his Word, that helps us make sense of our own stories, puts them in a wider picture. This stranger placed our stories of disappointment into a larger story of hope.

Isn't that what we do Sunday after Sunday, day after day. We gather and tell the story. We place the story of our own failures and frustrations (we start by confessing our sins) in the bigger story of Christ. We arrive heavy hearted, mourning our losses, arrive with our stories of sin, grief and disappointment and we place it in a bigger story of God's loving plan. *"The Gospel of the Lord"* the priest cries. The story we tell is Good News. *"Lift up your hearts"* the priest cries. Lift up your minds and your hearts and your imaginations to the bigger story of Christ. Our hearts are set afire. We find a new way of looking at our own stories, and a new way of looking out upon the world. *"This is my Body, given for you". This is my Blood, poured out for you."*

The Eucharist, in the words of today's psalm, shows us the path of life, the fullness of joy in Christ's presence, as he walks with us on our Emmaus Road.

It is typical of Luke that the final scene in the drama takes place at **a meal**. We move from Word into silence as we do in the Eucharist. We watch the gestures of Jesus. He **takes, blesses, breaks, and gives** the bread to them. We recognize him in the breaking of bread. We know him as the Crucified One, the Servant Messiah, Love Incarnate, the Risen Lord.

In the Emmaus story, what is curious is that the sudden disappearance of the Lord they have just regained does not seem to dismay the disciples. We would certainly expect that. But the narrative makes an important point. The community of faith that is to grow out of these experiences, that is us, will not have the physical presence or sight of Jesus. But that does not mean they will not have him as a companion on the journey. In Word and Sacrament, he will be with them to remind them of that day. They will remember that day when their "*hearts burned within them*", when they "*recognized him in the breaking of bread.*" The day he gave them back their hope.

And this story encourages us to break bread with the stranger, with the lonely, the grieving and bewildered, because he reveals himself there too.

Christ is alive. Christ is here. Christ loves us and goes with us. Each step of the way, down our Emmaus Road. Amen.

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Today's Gospel reminds us how central the Eucharist is in our lives as Christians, as the Lord comes momentarily in our midst.

So I am delighted today that some in our community have responded to the call to service in the liturgy as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. Some 20 parishioners would be commissioned or recommissioned, some at each of the 3 Masses.

With gratitude and joy we commission them now and ask for God's blessing upon them in their service at the altar and to the sick and housebound.

I thank our existing Eucharistic Ministers and ask them to come forward to renew their commitment, alongside our new Eucharistic Ministers.

Please come forward and stand before the altar.