

Second Sunday of Easter
5th Sunday of Lockdown 2020 – Sue Burns
Luke 24:13-34

Every now and again I catch sight of something familiar and see it as if for the first time. I stop and wonder at the beauty of the Autumn colours; the delicate strength of a rain drop balancing on a leaf; the images of the planet without pollution from. These moments are reminders of God our creator and the gift of creation. Some people are talking of these 5 weeks as a gift, sabbatical time, refreshment, recalibration and restoration. Other people are juggling too many things or facing too few. There is no one size fits all.

God reveals treasure in different ways. Luke's beautifully crafted story has given up its riches over generations. We have listened to the Spirit through it to discern where God is in human encounters;
a pattern for evangelism;
a blueprint for planning worship and many other things.

Are these or any other treasures in view today as we contemplate a move from lockdown on the cusp of change?

I trust that your mind has been active already.

Here are some ideas that came to me:

Jesus is not a super-hero – the people don't recognize him immediately.

His demeanour is gentle service. They've been through a catastrophe, the planned for victory party has become a tragic defeat. Jesus doesn't require positive thinking. He simply asks them to tell him what they are talking about. My heart is tugged by that short sentence

They stood still, looking sad.

In these recent days I have heard people say – I just don't have enough energy to do that.

I think that's a similar space – the enormity of the change has fallen like a blanket on some.

Tell me about it, says Jesus.

How we interpret Jesus' response, 'O foolish ones', may come from our own life experience.

When we speak, have we been told we are wrong if we don't understand?

Or when we ask, have we been given room for gentle encouragement?

Dead men don't live again, the couple's despair is hardly surprising!

In these days we are quietly confident that the government has guided us to a good place. It seems we have contained the spread and fatalities of this epidemic. The economy however is heading in the opposite direction.

Where and when we will stand on firm ground is unclear. The map ahead is uncharted.

This narrative reminds us our life story intersects with the narrative of God's action in history; remembering is a well from which we draw.

Jesus tells his own story – he unravels the accepted narrative of the Messiah that people repeatedly tried to squeeze him into when he was alive. Jesus shows that from the beginning the Messiah was to suffer and be raised from the dead. Even though he shows that the Scriptures point to him the travelers don't join the dots. According to their custom they offer the stranger hospitality, because it's too late for him to be safe on the road. After attention to hand hygiene they share the meal.

As Jesus takes, gives thanks, breaks and gives the bread *just as he had* at the supper they so recently shared, the travelers recognize their companion as Jesus himself.

It is then that they recall they had felt a warmth, when they had listened to the stranger on the road. Recollection, remembering and recognition go together. The travelers' joy is overflowing as they rush back to tell the other despondents that they have seen the risen Jesus.

Each time we gather in St Stephen's we frame our service on this narrative. We meet the risen Jesus in the readings, songs and prayers. We meet the risen Jesus as we use the same pattern as he did- taking, giving thanks, breaking and giving the bread.

Every time we do it –

we are bringing the past, the narrative of God's action through history, in the life, cross and resurrection of Jesus and life of the church

and

the future hope of God's priorities established in the church and spreading beyond into the mystery of now.

Most important events have these three aspects – think of a celebration, a wedding or holiday. There's the planning, then the craziness of the day, then the years of remembering, retelling, savouring and being changed because of it.

As we speak and re-speak our thanksgiving to God, visiting and revisiting our stories we are richer.

Our circumstances change and God is present to us in different ways. We notice different invitations and challenges. We meet God ourselves.

Christians of the past, like John Wesley who led the movement that took the gospel to working people in the UK; and the scholar CS Lewis who wrote the Narnia books, talked about this astonishing change in perspective. Wesley spoke of his heart strangely warmed and Lewis of seeing the world as if alight in a different way.

Jesus doesn't push his way into the travellers' conversation or home, he waits for the invitation. For many of us there comes a time when we recognize God's presence in new ways. The new often through the familiar, suddenly rendered strange and then restored in a different but better order.

Let's conclude with the prayer that is in the service sheet.

We give thanks

for companions with whom we can be honest and for open conversations;

that in times of confusion and sadness we are not alone;

that you speak to us through your presence in our lives and the history of your people;

that you reveal yourself to us through our minds, in our relationships and our senses;

that joy emerges after darkness making meaning of the past and future.

We ask

that we may recognise you and look out for your presence;

that we be prepared to connect the dots and release things that stop us seeing you;

that we will know you with us when we are alone or with people who don't understand or want to listen;

that you show us new possibility in your resurrected life;

that sharing familiar rhythms will bring hope and joy

We pray that

space will open up for people in bubbles where there is despair

those whose worlds have collapsed and who are facing disappointment and anxiety due lost employment, or grinding poverty will know your travelling presence.

that our communities will live out the joy of life in abundance

and your life will transform our families, communities and the world.