



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

3rd Sunday of Easter ~ April 26th 2020

Alleluia Christ is risen, he is risen indeed, Alleluia.

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

There are a good number of services that can be viewed online, perhaps especially Ely Cathedral, and I hope you are also watching those on TV or listening to those on the Radio. Last Sunday I watched good contributions from St Albans and Leicester Cathedrals, and you may have found others.

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

I hope you have received the prayers and guidance for "Spiritual Communion"

Prayers for this Week

O God of mystery, out of death you delivered Christ Jesus,
and he walked in hidden glory with his disciples.

Stir up our faith, that our hearts may burn within us
at the sound of his word, and our eyes be opened to him in the breaking of bread.

Grant this through Jesus Christ, the first-born from the dead,
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Lord of the gathering feast,
you walk with us on the shadowed road:
burn our hearts with scripture's open flame:
unveil our darkened eyes as bread is torn and shared
and from broken fragments bless a people for yourself;
through Jesus Christ, the host of the world.

Amen.

Old Testament Reading, Zephaniah 3 v14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgements against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time then I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

Gospel Reading Luke 24 v13-35

On that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’ Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

“Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.”

We have no idea (but would love to know!) which parts of the Old Testament Jesus chose to talk about with the two disciples on that Emmaus Road that first Easter day. Those who compile the choice of readings for Sundays have chosen this bit of Zephaniah as the Old Testament for today. In a quiz, if we had to name all the prophets or books of the bible, I rather suspect that Zephaniah would, if at all, be one of the last we would recall. A contemporary of the more prolific and well-known Jeremiah, Zephaniah writes at a time when disaster and destruction appear likely, although I get the impression this is more military and political destruction than a plague disaster.

A book I have, "How to Read the Old Testament" says Zephaniah's message is; "Since powerful men, kings, prophets and priests have got it wrong, the prophet turns to those who are poor in heart, those who do not pride themselves in their own strength, but put their trust in God. The love that the Lord has is the strongest of all. For the future, God at last sees the time when he will finally be able to be in the bosom of the daughter of Zion, in the midst of his people, and of all the people purified by his love. God only has to think of this to begin to dance with joy."

So, what do I make of this for the here and now?

- It is all too easy to be wise after the event and to say that powerful men have got it wrong. I am tired of commentators who appear to have the wisdom of hindsight, but did not speak or publish at the time. (You all know I am not a political fan of the present government, but jumping on band-waggon and pointing fingers is not useful.)
- It is all too easy for ordinary people to blame those who take decisions for the wrongs of the world. We would do better to look at whole systems and ways of social, political and economic life, and to acknowledge our collusion with them. (We all buy, consume, travel, pollute; we all allowed 'austerity' that put financial priorities above public services; we all sit preserving our comforts; we all see other parts of the world as far away.....)
- It is all too easy to try to keep ourselves healthy, pure if you like. To see such purity as our aim, and not really to connect with those far off who are ill, dying, bereaved, and dead. (I alluded one day in Holy Week, Wednesday, of facing my own death, but how often do I face it or share it with others?)

But there are more challenges.

- It is hard to see strength in weakness; to regard those who take the greatest personal risks as the best example; hard, to find community in isolation and to put others before ourselves; hard, to take pride in our helplessness.
- It is hard to see the future, probably accepting huge changes to life and perspectives; to plan where there seems no chance of realisation; to dwell on possibilities and goals and hopes.
- It is hard to accept that it is God's love for us that really counts, not our love for Him, our response to Him; that the Lord loves because it is His very nature, and as we share His love so we grasp His nature, as He grasps our pain and takes it into His very Self.

We would love to know which parts of the Old Testament Jesus chose on that Emmaus Road; "he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures." If it included this part of Zephaniah, whatever questions and challenges it gave to Cleopas and his companion were not apparent immediately for they still did not recognise him. They were tired, emotionally by the events in Jerusalem, and physically by the walk to Emmaus. It was evening, the end of day, darkness was approaching. They could go no further, but Jesus made as if to go on. They invited, no urged, him to stay and eat with them. He did. He broke bread. He took, he blessed, he broke, he gave, and they recognised.

Recognised him. Recognised the warming of their hearts. Recognised that brokenness gave understanding of the past, and was the gateway to the future. For they, who had been washed out and exhausted, now had the energy to retrace their steps, a days journey back. And, when they arrived back, to tell, to share and to shout that Jesus is risen!

Where we see things broken, let them give us understanding. Where we see things broken, let us have energy for the future. For when we think we have reached a destination, the journey goes on, or perhaps back but in a new light. When, like Zephaniah, we are surrounded by destruction, let us be hopeful. When, like Zephaniah, we are surrounded by those blaming others, we, the ordinary and weak, can make a difference. For the love God has for us is enough, for the Lord God is in the midst of us, for his brokenness embraces our brokenness, and what are our disasters become the breeding ground for new creation and new life.

Alleluia Christ is risen, he is risen indeed, Alleluia.

Andrew

Praise and Prayers

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Yesterday I was crucified with Christ;
today I am glorified with him.
Yesterday I was dead with Christ;
today I am sharing in his resurrection.
Yesterday I was buried with him;
today I am waking with him from the sleep of death.

**Our Lord Jesus Christ, risen from death,
we praise you for changed lives and new hopes at Easter.**

You come to Mary in the garden,
and turn her tears into joy.

**You come to the disciples in the upper room,
and turn their fear into courage.**

You come to the disciples by the lakeside,
and turn their failure into faith,

**You come to the disciples on the Emmaus road,
and turn their despair into hope.**

You come to your people now
and turn our weakness into triumph.

**Father of glory, holy and eternal
look upon us now in power and mercy.
May your strength overcome our weakness,
your radiance transform our blindness,
and your Spirit draw us to that love
shown and offered to us by your Son.
our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

Amen.