

Third Sunday of Easter – 23 Apr 2023

**1 Peter 1:17-23**

17 You call him Father, when you pray to God, who judges all people by the same standard, according to what each one has done; so then, spend the rest of your lives here on earth in reverence for him. 18 For you know what was paid to set you free from the worthless manner of life handed down by your ancestors. It was not something that can be destroyed, such as silver or gold; 19 it was the costly sacrifice of Christ, who was like a lamb without defect or flaw. 20 He had been chosen by God before the creation of the world and was revealed in these last days for your sake. 21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from death and gave him glory; and so your faith and hope are fixed on God. 22 Now that by your obedience to the truth you have purified yourselves and have come to have a sincere love for other believers, love one another earnestly with all your heart. 23 For through the living and eternal word of God you have been born again as the children of a parent who is immortal, not mortal.

**Luke 24:13-35**

13 On that same day [Easter Sunday] two of Jesus' followers were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and they were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed, Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them; 16 they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him. 17 Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about to each other, as you walk along?" They stood still, with sad faces. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?" 19 "What things?" he asked. "The things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. "This man was a prophet and was considered by God and by all the people to be powerful in everything he said and did. 20 Our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and he was crucified. 21 And we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free! Besides all that, this is now the third day since it happened. 22 Some of the women of our group surprised us; they went at dawn to the tomb, 23 but could not find his body. They came back saying they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive. 24 Some of our group went to the tomb and found it exactly as the women had said, but they did not see him." 25 Then Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! 26 Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?" 27 And Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets. 28 As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther; 29 but they held him back, saying, "Stay with us; the day is almost over and it is getting dark." So he went in to stay with them. 30 He sat down to eat with them, took the bread, and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they

recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" 33 They got up at once and went back to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven disciples gathered together with the others 34 and saying, "The Lord is risen indeed! He has appeared to Simon!" 35 The two then explained to them what had happened on the road, and how they had recognized the Lord when he broke the bread.

**Focus: Open our eyes and burn our hearts**

**Function:** Help people experience the risen Lord journeying with them, becoming hopeful and purposeful.

Last Sunday, we learnt about Jesus appearing to the disciples who fearfully hid in a locked room on the evening of the first Easter Sunday, according to the perspective of the author of John's Gospel. Similarly, today, we hear from Luke's Gospel that in the afternoon of that first Easter Sunday, Jesus appeared to two of his followers on the way to Emmaus, about 11 km North-West of Jerusalem. While Mark's Gospel only briefly mentions that "Jesus appeared in a different manner to two of the disciples while they were on their way to the country" (16:12), Luke's Gospel extensively reports what had happened.

These two followers, Cleopas and his companion, were probably on their way home after participating in the Passover festival in Jerusalem. So very likely, they had witnessed everything. Along with many other followers, they saw what had happened to Jesus: captured, tortured, crucified and died. All that had happened troubled them, and they couldn't stop talking and discussing with each other while on the way to Emmaus.

In saying, "We had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free," this indicates that they followed Jesus thinking that he was the Messiah (or the king) who would lead them to freedom from Roman's rule. So they would have learnt about the fanfare of Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem a few days ago, welcomed as a king, or perhaps they were among the crowds shouting, "Hosanna to the son of David!" Hence they had gone to Jerusalem to join their long-awaited Messiah and, at the same time, attend the Passover festival. Therefore, they entered Jerusalem full of hope but, sadly, left feeling hopeless and confused. With Jesus's death, their hope in Jesus being the liberating Messiah was shattered; all hopes were gone. Besides, the shocking announcement by the women that Jesus was alive didn't make much sense to them. "We have seen him crucified, pierced and laid in the tomb, so how could this be possible?" They might wonder. Therefore, this news brought them more confusion than joy. Nothing seemed to make sense, and they left Jerusalem baffled.

“What should we do?” Cleopas and his companion could have asked each other as they discussed and journeyed on, not knowing what could bring them hope again.

Besides inviting the original readers to whom this Gospel was written, the author of Luke’s Gospel also invites us onto this road to Emmaus to encounter Christ.

We all have different paths for our journey to Emmaus as we carry different burdens. Sometimes anxiety and worry may overwhelm us so much that we feel like empty shells. Sometimes grieving over the death of a loved one could be so unbearable that life becomes meaningless and aimless for a long time, and for some, it is lifelong. Some may feel helpless and lonely being aged and frail, or crippled by illness. And for some, work or career becomes unfulfilling and unpurposeful. The list goes on.

“What could we do?” We may also struggle like the two while on this road to Emmaus, especially when we hit a wall in a crisis and are left washed up spiritually, emotionally, financially and physically.

The Anzac Day remembrance will take place on Tuesday to honour the people who have served, and those who continue to serve, in Australia's armed forces, who had (and have) fought boldly and selflessly and sacrificed for the country and for peace and justice in all wars and conflicts so far. Now let us uphold anyone present here or online (or someone we know) who has lost loved ones to wars or conflicts while in service. Especially if such grief is still deeply buried within and resurfaces year after year during this time of remembrance, hurling you into the bottomless dark emotional pit.

Come, get onto your road to Emmaus, our risen Lord wants you to encounter him and experience his comforting & liberating peace.

On the road to Emmaus, as Jesus drew near and walked alongside Cleopas and his companion, he accompanied them like a close friend by their side.

“What are you talking about to each other as you walk along?” He asked caringly. “What things?” As he listened on, he queried further to invite them to share what was troubling them. Only after letting them fully disclose their crisis, Jesus pointed out their foolish thinking. Then he explained to them what was said about himself in the Scripture to help them understand why the Messiah must suffer, die and then rise to life to enter his glory. In other words, his death did not negate his identity as the Messiah but confirmed it as he rose to life.

However, even after hearing Jesus’s explanation, their minds still seemed closed, possibly due to their presumed reality based on their Good Friday experience in Jerusalem that Jesus was dead. But we see Jesus continue to journey along with

them patiently. When they reached Emmaus and the two invited him to stay with them for the night, Jesus sat down to eat with them, took the bread and said the blessing, then broke the bread and gave it to them.

Instantly, their minds cleared up, and their eyes opened up to recognise Jesus. Encountering Jesus on the road to Emmaus is indeed a wonderful blessing! The two disciples on the way were blessed not only by Jesus's presence but also by his words and sharing of a eucharistic meal with them. Their weary souls were renewed and liberated as their eyes were opened, and they found their hearts burning.

“Were not our hearts burning within us?” They said to each other. Their swelling sense of excitement now made complete sense as their eyes were opened to recognise Jesus.

What does it mean to have a “burning heart”, I wonder? For Cleopas and his companion, it is finally recognising their long-awaited Messiah, ministering to them and breaking bread with them. For me, it is the realisation that Jesus was journeying with me throughout my illness and bone marrow transplant, leading me through the valley of darkness.

And I would describe the feeling of the heart burning as like getting ready to open our eyes to see for the first time in our lives. Just imagine the excitement building up. Or it is like our intense longing for something is finally fulfilled; the joy and satisfaction are indescribable. Or it is like our hearts keep throbbing with our adrenaline surging as we uncover the long-sought-after treasure.

What about you? What are your heart-burning experiences and associated feelings in encountering Christ?

On our road to Emmaus, Jesus hears our silent cries, our struggles, and our prayers. He will draw near and walk alongside us. He readily meets us where we are, and he will warm our hearts and draw us out of despair, giving us Easter hope and new directions.

However, as we are the body of Christ, we are called to journey with others on their road to Emmaus. Would you readily respond to be the vessels to help them encounter Christ, letting the Holy Spirit open their eyes to see God's hand holding them, enabling them to experience burning hearts?

And this is Jesus's way of offering pastoral care for us to adopt: he actively listened to them; he didn't interrupt by rushing to correct their understanding or give his reasons, but let them express their confusion and concerns freely. He shared his views only when suitable, giving them space to internalise. He patiently and caringly journeyed with them.

Similarly, as we journey with others, we give ample time and space to listen to the other. And it is essential to actively listen to the person's entire story without attempting to interrupt with our views or explanations. Even our body language matters, signalling to the other whether we are interested or not.

With new hope, Cleopas and his companion immediately returned to Jerusalem to report to the apostles about their encounter with the risen Jesus. They could also now testify with the women because they too had seen the risen Lord.

Likewise for us, with new hope, new meaning and new possibility, we are renewed and re-energised to discover life in new directions.

Therefore, let the risen Jesus draw near to us, journey with us and embrace us, opening our eyes, giving us consolation and healing, and allowing us to experience burning hearts.

May we also find our hearts burning as we listen to God's Word and receive his sacrament. Amen.