

**May I speak in the name of the living God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

There were three occasions when Jesus followers failed to recognise him after his resurrection:

Firstly, when Mary was in the Garden early on the first Easter morning – she mistakes Jesus for the gardener.

Then the occasion we heard about in our Gospel reading today, the two friends on the road to Emmaus are joined by a stranger, who they later recognise to be Jesus.

And thirdly, the incident, a little while later, when Jesus offered breakfast to his disciples who had been fishing all night. Again, recognition comes very slowly.

I am sure that we have all experienced situations when we have seen someone out of context, and not immediately recognised them. Whether it is someone we pass in the street, or in the supermarket, or bump into on the train.

When I was a curate in Weymouth – I learned to swim. My swimming instructor was often telling me that people would frequently say to her – “I didn’t recognise you with your clothes on!”

On the hot and dusty road to Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion were so preoccupied with their thoughts and their problems that they didn’t know Jesus when he began walking with them.

At first sight, this seems hard to understand or explain. Jesus was in their thoughts. They were talking about him as they walked. They had almost certainly heard about the angel at the tomb telling the women who had gone there early in the morning, that he was alive.

Yet still, they weren't prepared for his appearance to them.

Perhaps they were too bruised by events to take it in. Punch drunk by the force of the blows that had hit them, reeling from the shock of the great change, and unable to adjust to it. Their minds were not simply unwilling, but unable to take it all in.

And so it was that Jesus joined them in this situation. He showed great sensitivity by joining them as a stranger. People often find it easier to talk to a stranger. With a simple direct question, asked in a kindly manner, Jesus enabled Cleopas and his friend to open up. They began to pour out all their sad story to him, as he gently, lovingly and caringly accompanied them.

Only when the disciples had finished did Jesus begin to talk. He took up the story where they left off.

Opening their minds to a new way of looking at the scriptures, he showed them how all the prophets had foretold that the Messiah would suffer and die, and so enter into glory. In this way, the death of Jesus was far from being an ending to dream and hope, it was part of the way in which it had to be realised.

I believe there are a number of important ways in which the experience of Cleopas and his friend on the Emmaus Road can speak to us.

Firstly, It was not until it was all over that the two disciples realised what had happened to them on the their journey. It was not until Jesus took the bread, blessed and broke it, that they realised who had been with them.

Isn't this how things are in real life. We live our lives forward, but understand them backwards. It is often only afterwards, and sometimes a long time afterwards that our eyes are opened and we being to see and understand a pattern and meaning in the journey we have made.

Jesus helped Cleopas and his friend to look back at events, to reflect on what had happened in the light of scripture and so find the meaning and pattern in them.

Looking back and reflecting is important for us too. Through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Jesus can help us in the same way, to make sense of the events of our lives, and see them in the context of our journey of faith.

The importance of this is reflected in a number of Christian Study Programmes, which draw on the Emmaus Road experience and indeed use the name Emmaus in their title.

It is good for us then to regularly take time to stop and reflect, so that we can then move forward with renewed vision and hope.

Secondly, Jesus came and joined the disciples as a stranger – to accompany them in their grief and distress.

He walked with them, and listened to them.

There are people in our world today, who like Cleopas and his friend are so battered by circumstance, so ground down by poverty or tragedy, that good news is almost impossible to accept.

We might think of people living in communities torn apart by war; or the millions of men women and children affected by drought and famine in many parts of Africa; or the victims of natural disasters – people whose lives have been turned upside down.

Jesus calls us, like him, to walk alongside them. To listen to their needs, to help in identifying ways of bringing hope and healing into their situations.

This is something which we can do both as individuals, and as a church and through our support of the work of organisations like Christian Aid.

During May, many churches will be organising events to raise money for Christian Aid. This essentially about walking alongside those who live in poverty in our world, so that eyes may be opened to their needs, and hearts moved to change systems that create the inequalities and suffering experienced by so many, and so make poverty history.

Thirdly, the experience of the friends on the Emmaus Road challenges us to think differently about change.

Some say that change is the only certainty in our world today. Of course, there are other certainties – but change does seem to be all around us.

Few of us like change; it makes us insecure. We all prefer the known, the familiar, the safe, and secure.

It is sometimes hard to make sense of some of the social, moral and political changes that we see in the world around us. Sometimes it is hard to see any good in many of them.

But Jesus is walking alongside us through these changes, just as he walked alongside his disciples on the Emmaus Road.

Sometimes, Jesus is in the change itself.
Sometimes, the Holy Spirit, creates change
to stretch us, to make us face reality, to help
us to grow.

The cross itself was change, radical change,
and without it there would have been no
future for the two walking to Emmaus, or for
any of Jesus followers.

Although it is not always easy, Jesus
presence helps to make sense of the
changes that come, and give us the
confidence and trust that we need to move
forward in a positive way.

Here in Aylesford our community is constantly changing and growing. The needs of those around us are changing. Patterns of churchgoing and worship have changed beyond measure over the past 20 years or so. The ways in which we as followers of Christ need to reach out to those around us is changing.

Jesus is alongside us in all of these changes. Our Stewardship Programme running throughout the month of May is about asking God to open our eyes, our hearts and minds, to all the things that he is calling us to be and to do in his name – so that we can be more effective in sharing in his mission of making God's love real and tangible for all people.

MEDITATION

***Lord, when we fail to recognise your
presence in our lives, open our eyes to
see you.***

When our hearts and minds are full of
questions,
When fear and doubts cloud our vision,
When the future seems bleak and uncertain,

Open our eyes to see you.

When we are blind to the needs of the poor
and hungry,
When greed or selfishness hinder our
generosity,
When the problems of the world seem too
big for us alone,

Open our eyes to see you.

When everything around us seems to be
changing,
When we cling to the old and familiar for
comfort,
When we feel threatened by new challenges,

Open our eyes to see you

For you walk alongside us on our journey,
As you walked alongside those journeying to
Emmaus,
And each step is a revelation of your love.

***Lord, when we fail to recognise your
presence in our lives, open our eyes to
see you.***