

Easter 3 2014

Sermon preached at La Chapelle Palluau by Revd Caroline Sackley

Many of us can probably remember the Sunday that we were told that Princess Diana had died. I can still remember the feelings of shock and grief that people expressed. Later of course there were the conspiracy theories, the recriminations, the blaming and the anger. But initially many people were just numb and churches were busy.

So it doesn't take too much imagination to put ourselves in the shoes of those disciples on the road to Emmaus. The person of whom they had so many expectations of, a person they respected, were perhaps fond of, their leader had died an awful death.

No wonder they couldn't stop talking for the 7 miles or so home to Emmaus. Dismay, shock, horror, grief and disappointment would have kept them company, and that obvious question "why?" The conversation probably went round and round in circles.

Then a stranger joins them, walking in the same direction, they don't even think about whether they can trust him with the knowledge of their allegiance, they could be putting themselves in grave danger, but the need to talk was overwhelming.

What the stranger says make sense to them, his knowledge of the Scriptures is outstanding, somehow it cheers them up, or distracts them at least. They reach their village, the stranger makes to go on, but their need for more talk, or that sense of hospitality which was so common to travellers, something makes them invite, the word used in fact is urged, him to stay.

He accepts, breaks bread and they recognise him. What joy, what surprise, what excitement they must have felt. So much so, that when he vanishes, no need to stay now they know him, they forget their tiredness, their fear and the time and rush back the way they had come to tell the others.

Matthew's Gospel makes much of feasting and eating and feeding. Jesus helps spread his teaching by being with people when they eat, hospitality often makes talking easier. It has been said that if you want people to attend a meeting or a service, offer free food and drink. Of course this doesn't apply here!

Jesus promises to be with us always in the last verse of Matthew's Gospel. He is alongside us not above us, he is found in unlikely places and unlikely people. "When did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you; or naked and clothe you?" (Matthew 25:37 onwards)

He also chooses unlikely people to send out to tell others about God. From those early disciples to now, we discover that he uses the flawed, the doubters, those who struggle. Again at the end of Matthew's Gospel we learn that "when they saw him they worshipped him, but some doubted." The commission we are given to go and "make disciples of all nations" may remind us of the imperialistic missionaries of the past, but we need to look at the examples of Jesus' techniques. This requires us to be alongside others, to work and serve, to talk and question. Bishop William Temple once wrote "Mission is not about the claims that we make, but the discoveries we enable".

Jesus didn't force himself upon his travelling companions, but he responded when they asked him in. Even now he doesn't force us to follow him, but if we invite him to he takes over our lives. He stays with us.

What a message for us at a Eucharist to hear that the men recognised Jesus in the blessing and the breaking of the bread. I pray that at this Eucharist we may all find him and know that excitement, that joy and the peace that comes from recognising him, in the broken bread and the wine outpoured. Amen