

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – Sunday 26th April 2020

Acts 2.14a, 36-41; 1 Peter 1.17-23; Luke 24.13-35

There is a dawning realisation in the country, that there is going to have to be a new normal, and everyone is of course apprehensive. What will it mean for us? What will it mean for families and businesses and people who live alone? What will it mean for schools and churches and holidays? What will it mean for our communities, our nation, and our identities?

For Christians, there are two keys to coping with this question. The first is the certainty that we belong to Christ, in that this does not change. So whatever else changes around us, this does not change. God does not change; he is still there. His love still surrounds us and holds us. It is not God's purpose that nothing else changes; clearly this is not his purpose; the whole of life teaches us this. What does not change, however, is that we belong to Jesus, and nothing can separate us from his love.

He is the still point; to which we can and must return again and again as the future unfolds. Because much else will change around us, in that journey of returning again and again to Jesus, we will discover new things about this still figure. It is not that Jesus changes, he remains the same. Rather it is we ourselves who change, or who are changed, or whose circumstances change, and so the figure of Jesus speaks to us in new ways. Amid all the uncertainty of this coronavirus crisis, we continue to belong to Jesus, and when we pay attention to him we will know this more surely.

The account of the dejected disciples meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus, is inspiring and evocative. The curiosity is that they don't recognise him at first, even after long conversation. But they do recognise him in the breaking of the bread. The story is a metaphor for the Christian life, and the experience of Christian community. Jesus is always present; we often don't recognise him; but in the breaking of the bread, we do then know him.

The disciples' lives had changed greatly, moving from excitement and hope to disappointment and loss. They had known and loved Jesus amid all the new things of his life and ministry. But now they needed to get to know him anew from a different perspective. The point is, that he was still with them, guiding them, and inspiring them. Jesus is the same today, amid all this global crisis, amid all the change. And he will be there too, in the new normal, going ahead of us.

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This then is the second key for Christians, in meeting the challenges of our journeys to the new normal. God is already there, but not so much in the things that are familiar, some of which we will be called to leave behind. Jesus is already there ahead of us, saying it's ok, I'm here, this is a safe way.

In the post resurrection days in the New Testament, Jesus keeps on doing this. He goes ahead of his disciples to Galilee. He is already on the shore in the morning as his disciples return from a fruitless night of fishing. He was already there on the road to Emmaus when his disciples met him. He was already with the disciples in the upper room before they noticed him. So whatever the future holds for each of us, individually and as a church, God is already there; Jesus is already there; and this does not change.

What does this mean for how we should try to live through this coronavirus crisis; when familiarities have been stripped away from us; when our usual supports and joys have been taken away; when things seem frighteningly different? It means that that we need to pay attention, to how God is meeting us in new ways. We are so used to God meeting us in what is familiar, but what we now need to do is to trust him, that he will also meet us in what is different too.

God is faithful; he has not abandoned us; and he will never abandon us. We can trust him in this, and strike out with courage and confidence to meet the new normal, because Jesus has already gone ahead of us; he is already there; and we will know him in the breaking of the bread.

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