

3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: LUKE 24:13-35

"Were not our hearts
burning within us
while he was talking
to us on the road...?"

REFLECT:

The Gospel passage for this Sunday, recounting one of Jesus' resurrection appearances, is a compelling read. Like all well-told stories, it drops in tantalising statements that provoke questions. Like verse 16 – "their eyes were kept from recognising him." Kept by what? By whom? The story is open to many interpretations and seems to invite them.

Jesus' appearance is just as 'teasing' – at the very moment of realisation he vanishes from view.

Theologians and poets have described the elusiveness of divine encounter; the way it seems we catch fleeting sideways glimpses at

best. The way that faith seems to be more about searching, thirsting and longing than anything tangibly grasped or achieved. My favourite, R.S. Thomas, describes it as “a room I enter / from which someone has just / gone.”

Another thing our Gospel reading conveys beautifully, though, is that faith is a communal endeavour. We need other people to share our experiences with, and to check them against. We need to talk about our traumas, disappointments, fears, and tentative hopes; the way the disciples were doing on that road when an apparent stranger joined them. We need others to confirm and validate the shared experiences that lift and sustain us, “Were not our hearts burning within us...?” We need others to be bearers of good news, like the women who “astounded us” with their testimony. And sometimes, just as the disciples needed Jesus’ wisdom, we need others to help us find meaning in events that seem catastrophic.

We need one another. Now more than ever. I’m reminded of it every time I see the faces in our congregations through the wonder that is ‘zoom’; my heart lurches with relief and swells with gratitude, and I’m surprised by this revelation of how much I’m missing you all, and how much comfort these virtual encounters bring.

This week I spoke with a member of one of our congregations who hadn’t been able to get to church for a while before the lock-down began. He commented that he feels much more connected now; the resources that have become available in the last few weeks have made him “feel part of the church” again. This is a poignant challenge to us: hopefully, when we’ve come through this, we can do better than ‘getting back to normal.’ We’re learning new ways to be together. This time of physical distance has the potential to bring us closer, as communities, as friends, as sisters and brothers in Christ. May this be so.

CONNECT:

Reach out! Send an email, make a phone call. These connections are precious, and sustaining. Don't go through this alone.

PRAY:

- Give thanks for those who are helping us stay connected. For postal workers. For neighbourhood support groups. For technology, and those in our congregations who have the expertise to help us use it.
- Remember in your prayers all who are lonely, who are struggling with being on their own, whose isolation is compounded by the lock-down.

RESOURCES AND CONTACTS:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

If you need any help, have a prayer request, or would like someone to talk to; please contact your elder or one of us:
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