

**April 19**

## **Recognise, Realise, Respond**

Acts 2.14a,36-41, Psalm 116.1-4,11-18 (p.346), 1 Peter 1.13-25, Luke 24.13-35

In our reading from Acts, Peter addresses the people, both Jews and others who live in Jerusalem. He tells them that they have listened to the voices that condemned Jesus and so have been misled about who he was. In misreading this reality, they have joined in the condemnation and have lost sight of the one they were expecting.

In preparing for today's service with the wonderful occasion of baptism at the 11 am service, I was amazed to see in the set reading for today, what Peter said next. 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.'

These words continue to have resonance with us today. Many here have been baptised, as babies, as children, or as adults, taking on those baptism promises. Today, another little one will be baptised at St Michael's.

[11 am only, When we come to the baptism of Little Liam, I urge you all to revisit that commitment and to take to heart those same promises made for you and by you.]

The psalm speaks of having a deep relationship with God. It speaks of past experience, present commitment, and future hope, trust and expectation. It speaks of a lifetime of learning, through times of anguish and times of rejoicing. When we have a deep and abiding relationship with someone, anyone, we know that we can count on them in good times and bad. Knowing this, we are thankful and appreciative of the value of that relationship. How much more so it is with our relationship with God.

We often question why we and those we love go through times of hardship and sorrow, and yet it is often in those times that the bonds of that relationship are strengthened. There are good reasons why the marriage service contains the words, "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health." When couples want to write their own marriage vows, they really value the parts about loving and cherishing and the intention that this relationship is forever. I have never had a couple who were especially enthusiastic about the better and worse part. It's not that they do not have that intention to be there for one another, but that the hard parts are not on their current horizon. Yet, supporting one another in hard times strengthens those bonds in a unique way. We see this more universally when people endure and help one another through natural disasters, wars, health crises, financial crises, family sorrows, and more.

In our New Testament reading, we hear more from Peter about how lives lived for Christ are changed in the most fundamental way. Ignorance chases after all sorts of things, but when you know, you know. Maya Angelou famously said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." This applies to many areas of life, not just the life of faith. Peter put it a bit more forcefully, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do." We are to be holy because of the Holy One who cares about us and calls us.

The Gospel reading is a beautiful one. The disciples are leaving Jerusalem to go to a village. We know its name, not because of anything else that it is or was famous for, but for this story, this event. There are many places and organisations named after Emmaus, with an emphasis on caring. Emmaus Walk fosters faith, Emmaus retirement centres and hostels care for the vulnerable.

Why was this encounter special? We can hark back to Peter's contrast of ignorance and knowing. The disciples encountered Jesus but did not know who he was. Jesus asked them what they were talking about, and they shared all that was on their hearts. They spoke of Jesus, of hope and despair at the crucifixion, then renewed hope in the resurrection, and the pain of being unable as yet to see confirmation of that resurrection hope.

Notice that Jesus listens to them before he talks to them. That is a good model for ministry and for life. How can you see someone's life and God's purpose for them through the lens of God's love if you do not know their story? Perhaps someone also sees Jesus in you and your life, but does not yet know his name. Knowing Christ can be a sudden revelation or a slow unfolding.

In this account, after hearing where they were at, Jesus takes the long road with the disciples, verbally as well as physically. He does not just say, "Here I am." He takes them step by step through the scriptures, through tradition and prophecy, through what the Messiah must suffer and do. Their hearts are moved to spend more time with him.

They invite him to stay. God's love and the love of Jesus are always invitational towards us. No-one is forced or compelled. Love is offered to us, and we, in turn, can invite Jesus into our hearts. This is also the way in which we invite others. Faith, like relationship, is a gift freely offered.

Final recognition comes with the familiar breaking and sharing of bread. What Jesus has done before, he does again. We too can recognise Jesus in the breaking of the bread. At every Communion service, we gather in Jesus' name to hear God's Word, pray for the world, both near and far, and then bless, break and share the bread of life. We pray that, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, our hearts and minds will also be opened to him. Amen.