

With the disciples on the Emmaus Road

Prayer and Reflection, with the breaking of bread



Hymn

Jesus, stand among us in thy risen pow'r; let this time of worship be a hallowed hour.

Breathe the Holy Spirit into ev'ry heart; bid the fears and sorrows from each soul depart...

Thus with quickened footsteps we'll pursue our way,
watching for the dawning of eternal day.

Read aloud from Luke 24, 13-16

On the evening of the first day of the week two disciples were walking in the country and they were talking about everything that had happened. And, as they talked, Jesus himself came up and walked alongside them - but they were kept from recognizing him...

Prayer (to say aloud)

Lord, we thank you that on our earthly journey, you walk quietly and lovingly beside us, to listen, to comfort, to guide and to encourage.

Lord, we often fail to recognize you...But

You are here, in the face and hands of those walking beside us.

You are here in the fall of sunlight and the soft notes of music.

You are here in the words of comfort that we will hear from your word.

You are here in the bread and wine which will become, for us, your body and your blood.

You are here by Your Holy Spirit as you promised to be...

Lord, like those disciples on the Emmaus Road, we are sad, bewildered, confused and tired and so we invite you to come and speak words that burn within our hearts.

We invite you to stand among us in your risen power...

In a moment of silence, let us bring to mind our doubts, fears and failings...

As we speak among ourselves so Jesus draws alongside us to listen and speak

So, let us invite the Holy Spirit of the risen Lord to come...

To speak words of comfort and strength... To be present with us...

(SILENCE)

Song

To be in your presence, to sit at your feet

Where your love surrounds me and makes me complete

This is my desire, o Lord, this is my desire - this is my desire, o Lord, this is my desire

To rest in your presence not rushing away

To cherish each moment here I would stay

This is my desire, o Lord, this is my desire - this is my desire, o Lord, this is my desire

Read aloud from Luke 24, 17-31

Jesus asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself - and while they listened, their hearts burned within them. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued as if he were going further. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him...

Prayer (to say aloud)

Risen Lord, like those disciples of old,

We think we are inviting you by the urging of our restless spirits

But your unfathomable and irresistible love is inviting us

The house and the table are yours - The bread and the wine are yours - the gifts of body and blood are yours...

We invite you to eat some bread (or an appropriate substitute), remembering that the Risen Lord is with us, strengthening us with the power of His resurrection body...

We invite you to drink some wine or juice (or an appropriate substitute), remembering that the Risen Lord is with us, refreshing us with the grace of His unconquered love...

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer (to say aloud)

Lord, as you spoke from the Scriptures to the disciples on the Emmaus Road, so that their hearts burned within them, so speak to us now from Your word - that our love for you may be kindled and our desire to serve you may be revived...

Reflection

Jesus said "Where two or three gather in my name I am there among them." This is often taken as the simplest definition of the Church - not a building but people, the family of God gathered in His presence. And the story of the Emmaus road shows us three pictures of the Church living in the light of the resurrection.

The first is a picture of fellowship and prayer. As the two disciples walk along the road they talk to each other about the things that they have experienced and, as they talk, Jesus himself draws alongside to listen, to hear and then to speak. The disciples are able to talk openly about their deepest feelings: broken dreams, bitter failures, disappointed hopes and their inability to share in the certainties of others. We all need somebody to whom we can be completely open; a partner, a friend, an elder or Minister. As the hymn says: "Brother, Sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you; a companion on the road; let me help you walk the mile and bear the load; hold the Christ-light for you in the night-time of your fear; share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through."

Secondly, the picture is of a community listening to the Scriptures interpreted to them by the living Christ; not a dry, dusty theology but a living challenge that engages their passion, makes their "hearts burn". Not a theology of vacuous triumphalism on one hand nor wallowing in despair on the other but balanced truth speaking of the saving involvement of God with His people throughout history. God's presence is witnessed to in the stories of the Old Testament, in both captivity and redemption, in success and fall, in exile and return. God, in Christ is present and at work. And it His invitation to walk with Him and partner with Him in His saving work that fires our hearts to action.

Thirdly, we have a picture of a Church in loving communion with Christ, invited to our tables, (or is He the one doing the inviting?) He presides at the feast and breaks bread as a sign of His friendship with us, symbolized by a meal representing a New Covenant - it is a friendship that is unbreakable. Curiously, as they sit at the table the disciples still haven't recognized Jesus and yet, as He sits and breaks bread, suddenly they see him as he really is. Did something in that action trigger a sudden memory that brought recognition? Jesus had sat with these disciples on many, many occasions and broken bread with them - it was the thing that he did - it was Recognisably-Jesus-Like to do it. Although we often think people outside the Church don't know a lot, I think they recognise real Christianity when they see it in action. They recognise the "Jesus way of doing things". So let us be like Jesus to our neighbours, friends and family and do that Jesus thing. Then they will recognise the risen Lord in us.

In Acts, we are told that the early Church, so empowered by the Spirit of the Living Christ, devoted themselves to fellowship and prayer, to the teaching of Scripture and to the breaking of bread. And it all started on the road to Emmaus, where two or three gathered...

If we are able, let us meditate as we listen to Graham Kendrick's song: *Comforting Stranger* about the Emmaus Road encounter: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYGARA4f1ZU>

Now, we respond to the word of the Lord in prayers of intercession and commitment...

Prayers of Intercession (to say aloud)

Lord, You walk alongside us and listen - so hear our prayers for all who are suffering and in pain at this time, those dying and those grieving, those who are sick and those caring. Help your Church be a family where the deepest hurts and disappointments can be shared without judgement. Help every one of your people find a true friend within your family, so that the barriers of loneliness may be broken and we, in our turn, may listen to the pain of the world with love and compassion.

Lord, You open the Scriptures to us so that our hearts burn - so we pray for Your family, scattered at this time, that we may yet hear Your voice speaking to us in the power of Your Spirit. Hearing your voice, may we work so that the world perceives Your activity and presence among us, bringing Your kingdom of justice and healing. Guide the nations and rulers of this world with Your wisdom in this time of challenge so that peace and reconciliation may become the reality of a new age, through whose birth pains we are living.

Lord, You sit with us at the table and break bread for us so that we are welcomed into Your presence - so hear our prayers for those who are lonely and shut in by the crisis we are experiencing. Help your Church imitate Your example that we may live lives that demonstrate the compassion and character of Jesus, that the world may recognize You. Be the strength of all, in our community, who are Christ to the world: health workers bringing healing, care workers bringing dignity and neighbours bringing help and friendship. These prayers we bring in the name of the Risen Lord who meets us on the road of life...

Hymn

Abide with me! fast falls the eventide; The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless: Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness:
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Read aloud from Luke 24, 31-33

Jesus disappeared from their sight and they asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road?' So they got up and returned...

Blessing Prayer (to say aloud)

Risen Lord, we thank you that even in the moment when you were recognised, you disappeared from the disciples' sight.

Help us not to cling to false and momentary pictures of you, but have courage to see you in new ways, follow you in new paths and share you in new words - so may you bless us, Creating Father, Risen Son and Living Holy Spirit - Amen.