

SUNDAY 19th April 2020

Call to worship- *Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory. 1 Peter 1:21*

Good morning and welcome to our Regent St Methodist service of worship this 2nd Sunday of Easter.

As we continue through this very strange time in the life of our land and our world, we come again this Sunday to remember that though the road may be rough for many today, that the good news is that we don't have to walk it alone.

The Risen Christ draws close to his people, he walks with us. Let us pray.

Prayer- O God, great giver of life, we worship you today as the One who draws near us. The One who comes to be with us, even if at times we fail to recognise you. We praise you this morning for all your past mercies to us, for that forgiveness generously given, for that comfort caringly shared, for your deep faithful love for us. Emmanuel, God with us, we worship you this morning, for you are generous, faithful and loving in all your ways.

So Lord we thank you for your presence with us now each in our own homes. Some of us are feeling fine while others may be burdened by the weight of this crisis or some other worry or grief.... But this morning we declare that Jesus is alive...and that He, through His Spirit is present, in and with His people... Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit we worship you now as the One who shares our joys and sorrows.

Yet as we remember what you have done for us, as we recognise you drawing near, so we feel our need once more for your grace. Lord God we confess that we have not always recognised or even sought your presence. Lord, forgive us, for sometimes our faith is weak and sometimes we journey our own paths.... We confess our sins to God ...

Lord we thank you that in and through Jesus we... *'have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God.'* 1 Peter 1:23

We are now going to sing our opening hymn *'Blessed assurance'*, which is taken from a morning service a few years ago. Following that Kerri Cunningham will read our Old Testament Reading from Psalm 16.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!

O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Refrain:

*This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour, all the day long;
this is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
2 Perfect submission, perfect delight,
visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
angels descending, bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love. [Refrain]*

*3 Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest,
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love. [Refrain]*

Old Testament Reading Psalm 16:7-11

*I will bless the Lord who guides me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I know the Lord is always with me.*

I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice. My body rests in safety.

For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your holy one to rot in the grave. You

will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.

Video- 'None like You'

Gospel Reading Luke 24:13-35 (Laura Irvine)

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognising him. ¹⁷ He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?' They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ 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?'

¹⁹ '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. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ 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. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.'

²⁵ He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further. ²⁹ 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

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

Sermon- Amo...amas...amat .. amamus... amatis...amant.. Now before some of you start to think that I am beginning to lose my mind, I better explain....The above words are the conjugation of the Latin verb 'to love' and the amazing thing is that I still remember this rhythmic pattern after all these years. While many other more important and useful things have slipped away!

I am told that we all learn differently and it seems that rhymes work for me! You of course will have your own ways of trying to remember and learn things. However I would guess that most of us learn better when we are asked to work thorough a problem, alongside our teacher, rather than just being given an answer to learn. Certainly I find it helpful to discuss issues or problems with others and so together 'journey' towards an answer.

Last week on Easter Sunday we paused with the women as they stood at the empty tomb and saw for themselves that Jesus was not there. This Sunday, as we jump across from Mark's gospel to Luke's, we meet two other followers of Jesus. Two disciples, possibly husband and wife, who do see Jesus but fail to recognise him! Perhaps you, like me, have wondered why these followers of Jesus failed to know that it was their master. Scholars have speculated about Jesus' risen body being somehow the same, yet different enough to cause confusion. However the truth is that Luke tells us clearly in verse 16 that they were '*kept from recognising him*'.

Why did Jesus not just reveal himself at the start when he first met Cleopas and his travelling companion? Well perhaps the truth is that these disheartened, doubting disciples needed that journey with Jesus. Perhaps it would take that journey to revive and restore their wounded faith. Yet can you imagine this vital journey talking place if Jesus had just suddenly appeared

in front of this couple, fully recognisable in risen glory? I think the truth is that while they certainly would have been awestruck by a clear revelation like this, they would also have been so stunned that any chance to have the scriptures slowly opened to them would have been lost. You see while our direction and destination is always important, so too is the journey to get there.

As this morning we sit in our homes rather than our church building it is natural to dream of the day 'when all this will be over'. I certainly look forward to that day when we will meet face to face and raise our voices together in praise and worship. However as much as I long for that day, I also don't want to miss the lessons that can be learnt through this difficult journey. Perhaps lessons about the power of prayer, or lessons about priorities or even lessons about togetherness and family. In our understandable yearning to get through this, let us not miss the lessons that God may be sharing with us in it.

Every once in a while a friend from India will come to visit when they are in the UK for some reason. On one particular occasion my friend Raj was able to visit us in Cork and I remember setting out with him for an evening walk. Of course as these days we only get to meet very occasionally we had much to catch up on and the conversation flowed freely. So we set that evening walking and chatting, talking and travelling...until I realised we had gone much further than I had intended and now we had a long walk home!

Yes some of my best conversations have occurred while walking, for journeys provide valuable space for us to deepen our relationships. As Cleopas and his companion travelled those seven miles to Emmaus they didn't just grow in scriptural knowledge, they grew in understanding and relationship with the one they walked with. Yes as Jesus opened up the scriptures to them their hearts began to 'burn' vs 32 and they began to grow hungry for the company of this stranger. So much so that when the stranger said he was travelling on further than Emmaus *they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.'* vs 29

Could it be that the most important lesson for us during this season is that we simply need to hunger more for Jesus' company? How easy it can be in the normal rush of this world to get busy and consumed with this or that. Might it be that this time of enforced 'slowing down' opens up for some of us much needed space? Is this a time when we can renew our relationships with each other and with the one who longs to walk with us on the road of life? Then perhaps we need to invite our travelling companion to 'stay with us' by daily turning to the scriptures, trusting him to open them to us in fresh ways. Do we also need to ask Jesus to open our eyes so that we recognise him, not just at the Lord's Table and in Church, but also in the ordinariness of our daily lives?

Let us dare to say as Cleopas and his companion did, '*stay with us.*'

One final thought, just as I lost track of time and distance as I walked with my friend Raj. See how the excitement of their encounter with the risen Jesus led these disciples to jump up, although it was now late, and travel those seven miles back to Jerusalem. The joy and excitement of meeting their Lord led them to forget the distance or the time for there was good news to share. I pray that God would give us hearts and minds that are so enthused by Him that we can't keep our saviour to ourselves rather we find ourselves often saying, '*it is true! The Lord has risen!*' vs 34

Prayer-So let us pray '*When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on our way! While we do his good will, He abides with us still, & with all who will trust & obey.*' John Henry Sammis

Heavenly Father we are once again humbled and amazed by the marvellous truth that you long to walk with us along life's path. We praise you Jesus as our risen Lord, and we ask that you would set our hearts burning through scripture and the closeness of your presence. We also ask you to open our eyes so that we might recognise you in our daily lives and give us courage that we might point to your presence with increased confidence. Lord help us to trust and obey.

We pray now for our world and we continue to ask You Lord to show mercy at this time and bring healing and hope.

God who is with us, we thank you now for your faithfulness and for answered prayer over these past weeks. So we bring to you now all who are sick at this time. Lord please bring healing to those who are ill with Covid 19 and also those who are ill from other ailments. (pause)

We also continue to ask for protection for all those working in our hospitals, care homes and in all essential services. Heavenly Father we are so thankful for their selfless care and we pray that you would continue to set a shield of protection around them and their families. Lord continue to give them energy and courage in this most difficult of seasons. (pause)

Let us also continue to ask God to bring comfort and hope to those who are grieving. For the many who have had a relative taken from them by Covid 19 and for those in our own church family who have recently lost a loved one. Lord of all comfort we ask you to continue to make your presence powerfully real to them in the days ahead. (pause)

As we pray for those in our church, so we have been asked to remember in prayer our overseas world development and relief partners each week. This week we pray for Open schools worldwide who provide literacy and numeracy programs for some of the poorest children in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya and Ethiopia. As schools across the globe have closed in the present crisis so all OSWW classes have also been closed due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Unlike formal schools in Africa and our schools in Ireland & the UK, OSWW cannot conduct classes online as their teaching volunteers and pupils do not have technology or home internet access.

In Ireland & the UK, many children are able to receive free school meals at home while schools are closed. OSWW provide up to 3 meals a day when children are in their classes and for many, this would be the only food they received that day. They are not able to do so during lockdown.

As well as their educational needs, OSWW staff are also concerned about pupils who are vulnerable and at risk of domestic violence. Many of these families rely on 'piece jobs' such as cleaning someone's house or their garden and are now out of work and so struggling financially. It is also important to note that social distancing may not be possible for many communities and so people live in constant fear of becoming infected.

So now we pray for our partner. – Loving God, we pray for Open Schools Worldwide as they deal with the impact of Covid-19.

We pray for their Directors, staff and volunteers. Thank you, God, for their heart to serve you through this ministry. Grant them wisdom, clarity and unity as they make decisions in the weeks ahead.

We pray also for the children in OSWW classes. Thank you, God, for their desire to learn and for the community and care they find in OSWW. God, keep them safe from the virus. In their homes and communities, where social distancing may not be possible, we pray for your protection.

God, in the uncertainty, fear and worry we pray that your hope, faithfulness and comfort will be known. Guide OSWW through every challenge and let them be a beacon for You. amen.

So let us finish now by saying the Lord's prayer together.... **Our Father**.....

Hymn – 'Saviour lead us' Ian Pope.

Closing blessing On our journey to the future let us choose to follow Christ; and though sometimes fearful, let us trust that he will meet us on the way, and set our hearts on fire with hope and joy and life and good news to tell to all.

We say the grace together- *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all forevermore. Amen*

