

Sermon for Sunday 19 April 2026 at Holy Trinity Geneva at 9h30

Texts: Zephaniah 3.14-end; Acts 2.14a, 36-41; Luke 24.13-35

Return to Jerusalem

There is a famous legend about St Peter of how, as he fled persecution in Rome travelling along the Via Appia (the long Roman road which stretched from Rome to Brindisi), he had a vision of Jesus coming towards him, carrying his cross. In his confusion and terror, Peter asked him, “Domine, quo vadis? – Where are you going? Jesus responded, “I am going to Rome to be crucified again’. Struck to the core, Peter turned around and returned to Rome to bear witness to Christ and to face what lay ahead.

I imagine that Cleopas and his companion were experiencing similar feelings of terror and confusion as they set out on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. What they were leaving was literally terror- the brutal crucifixion of Jesus and threat now to the lives of his disciples. But they also faced the mental and spiritual terror and chaos of the collapse of their hopes and expectations. Jesus, the one whom they believed was sent by God to save his people and in whom they had put their trust and hopes, was dead – dying a criminal’s death of utter humiliation. They saw their world and all its familiar landmarks torn apart.

So they flee, and in their anguished flight, we can imagine them in agonised discussion and questioning. ‘Why did it end like this?’ ‘What possible hope is there for them and their fledgling community in the light of Jesus’ crucifixion?’ Was he really the Messiah and if so, why did he and they get it so wrong?’

Yet as they flee, discussing these matters in their anguish a stranger draws near to them and begins to question them. To them, his question about what things have been taking place in Jerusalem must have been astonishing – similar to our amazement when we occasionally meet someone today who has somehow managed to achieve a total news blackout.

As they relate to him their hopes and longings about Jesus of Nazareth, his death and with it the death of their hopes and bewildering accounts which they had received from the women in their group that he had risen from the dead, Jesus challenges them for failing to perceive what has happened as God’s plan. As they walk together, he leads them to begin to grasp how all the events which have led up to the crucifixion of Jesus, were foretold in scripture and are not random or a failure. As he breaks bread before them at dinner in the inn, their eyes are finally opened, and they recognise with joy that Jesus has indeed risen. And as he vanishes from them, they see with new vision, how all that he said to them as they journeyed on the road has led them to this truth – he is risen, and because he has risen, the world now has a totally new perspective, suffused with the hope of his resurrection life.

It’s in the light of this insight, that they return to Jerusalem, that place of their former terror to tell their fellow disciples what has happened. As they about to share their momentous news, they hear from them that Jesus has already appeared to Peter

and share their momentous news of how Jesus made himself known to them both on the road and in the breaking of the bread at dinner.

How does the Emmaus story speak to us? We face a world which is in a state of flux, particularly as a result of the current war in the Middle East. Although we are sheltered from much of its impact here in Switzerland, we experience the effects on oil and gas prices, we see the escalation of war and the terrible impact of those immediately caught up in it.

But we are also witnessing a collapse of so many of the certainties which underpinned our lives and our planning following the last World War. These include respect for international law and democratic processes, the strength and respect for international bodies which uphold the law and the possibility within a context of peace to allocate more of our resources within each country to initiatives other than defence. So much of this has now unravelled, with alarming speed, leaving us confused and frightened.

For us, as with those first disciples, when the world appears to be falling apart all around us, we too are often tempted to flee. In our case, in Switzerland, not necessarily in physical flight, but in flight of our minds, hearts and souls in engaging what is happening. This can happen too when we are facing times of difficulty and emotional stress in our own lives. We retreat from engaging with what it is going on because it feels too hard, too painful. Instead, we desire to put the barriers up to protect ourselves against further change and challenge. It's easy for us to be tempted to do this in a church context too, so that our church becomes a place of sanctuary, and familiarity, where we can be protected and insulated from the world's pain.

But we, as followers of Jesus Christ, are Easter people and 'Alleluia' (Praise the Lord) is our cry. The Emmaus story reminds of this today in so many ways and challenges us to consider which way we approach life now. Are we fleeing or are we bearing witness as Christ's Easter people?

For we see in Jesus' encounter with the disciples on the road, that the risen Christ encounters us too wherever we are. He is there even when we are running away from situations which threaten to overwhelm us, when we are scared, confused, and often ashamed too of our own cowardice.

He meets us in the midst of our questioning, our searching and doubts and as we've seen with the disciples on the road, this was the starting point for his engagement with them. As he encounters us in our prayers, in our reading of the Bible and our engagement with other people, he guides and helps us to see his risen presence in our midst and to glimpse what his resurrection means for our world today.

Above all, the Emmaus story shows us how our encounter with the risen Christ shifts our perspective of how we see the world and our own role as disciples of Jesus Christ within it. The disciples saw, in a moment of utter clarity, that the stranger who broke the bread before them was none other than the risen Christ. Although he vanished from their sight at that moment – it was enough- their reaction was one of absolute joy and faith. Jesus was risen from the dead.

This didn't mean that the world had suddenly changed and become an oasis of peace, harmony and safety. The Roman Empire and all that it involved was still in place with its attendant terrors; the religious authorities still wielded great power; and those claimed to follow Jesus of Nazareth had a price on their heads. But it meant that they saw the world from a totally new perspective in which Christ had risen from the dead as the climax of God's plan for the salvation of the world. In the light of this revelation, they find the courage, vision and joy to run back through the darkness to the place of their former terror to share the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

Today as we prepare for our AGM later this morning, let us too remember that we are Easter people. Wherever we are just now, whether excited about the future, scared and fleeing or caught, mesmerised by the prospect of a forthcoming time of change, draw courage from the reality that the risen Christ is with us and will walk with us.

In this assurance, we will start by looking back at the year which has just past, thanking God for all the signs of where He is at work in our midst. We'll give thanks too for those many, many people in our congregation who through their faith, generosity and kindness have helped to make Christ visible to us and to others including the visitors and those who seek help in our church.

We have time too to reflect on lessons we have learnt in the last year which will help us, as good stewards of God's creation to apply these in the year ahead.

And today is also a time when we look forward with vision and hope, to the forthcoming year. An interregnum is a fruitful time when one can stand back a little and discern, in this period of transition, where God may be calling this community of believers at Holy Trinity to witness, serve and focus its energies in in the future. As we do this, it's worth reflecting on where we discern God may be calling each one of us to offer our gifts and talents right now and how we would like to do this at Holy Trinity.

The disciples of the Emmaus Road ran back to Jerusalem with joy and expectation when they encountered the risen Christ, to testify to and share the hope which his resurrection offers to the world. May we today, as Christ's Easter people, put aside our fears and instead invite him to use us, in every way we can, in His service in the year ahead.

Amen

Canon Daphne Green