**‘WALKING TOWARD THE SUNRISE’**

**AN ACT OF WORSHIP FOR EASTER DAY APRIL 12th 2020**

**With Rev Warren Bardsley – Minister at Whitacre 1977 - 1982**

 **CELEBRATING THE 200th ANNIVERSARY OF**

 **NETHER WHITACRE METHODIST CHURCH**

**Introduction**

Today is unexpectedly different from the celebration you had planned for this bi-centenary. I had looked forward with keen anticipation to sharing the day with you, but sadly is was not to be. The best I can do is to send warm greetings to you and share this act of worship I have prepared so that in your homes, either alone or with members of your household you can celebrate this day, which is, for Christians, the most important of the year, hold one another in love and in resurrection hope.

**Opening sentences**

Late that same day, the first day of the week, when the disciples were together

Behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. ‘Peace be with you’, he said. Then he showed them his hands and his side. On seeing the Lord the disciples were overjoyed.

The Lord is risen!

**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

**Hymn : Christ the Lord is risen today. (298 STF: Charles Wesley)**

1 Christ the Lord is risen today : Alleluia!

 All creation joins to say: Alleluia!

 Raise your joys and triumphs high: Alleluia!

 Sing you heavens, let earth reply: Alleluia!

2 Love’s redeeming work is done: Alleluia!

 Fought the fight the battle won: Alleluia!

 Vain the stone, the watch, the seal: Alleluia!

 Christ has burst the gates of hell: Alleluia!

3 Lives again our glorious king: Alleluia!

 Where O death is now your sting? Alleluia!

 Once he died our souls to save: Alleluia!

 Where’s your victory boasting grave? Alleluia!

4 Soar we now where Christ has led: Alleluia

 Following our exalted Head: Alleluia!

 Made like hum, like him we rise: Alleluia!

 Ours the cross, the grave, the skies: Alleluia!

**Prayer of thanksgiving**

In the silence thank God for his faithfulness, his mercies which are new every morning; and especially today for the truth of resurrection, of love victorious over hatred of life victorious over death, of truth victorious over falsehood of faith victorious over fear of the promise that nothing in present or future

can separate us from that love which raised Jesus from death to life.

Bless the Lord my soul and all that is within me prise his holy name. Amen.

**Gospel : Luke 24:13-35 (Good as new version)**

Today we’re thinking of journeys; the journey of this chapel over 200 years; the journey of a community which has lived through tumultuous times, from the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars and the huge social changes brought by the industrial revolution; years which have seen two world wars; times of prosperity and peace, and within that story, the journeys of hundreds of individual people who have found here the seeds of a living faith which have borne fruit sometimes in other places. We are in good company. So its fitting that today’s gospel tells the story of a journey which is a living picture of the encounter of the living Christ with the church and the world in every age.

**The same day two friends of Jesus were on their way to Emmaus, a few miles from Jerusalem. They were discussing the events of the weekend. As they were talking, Jesus met up with them, going the same way. They didn’t recognize him in the failing light. Jesus said, “*You were deep in conversation as you were walking along. What were you talking about?”*  They hesitated for a moment and their faces were sad. Then one of them called Cleopas said, “*You must be the only visitor to Jerusalem who doesn’t know what’s been happening the past few days!”*  Jesus said, “*What do you mean?”* They said, “*Haven’t you heard of Jesus from Nazareth, a great speaker from God who did wonderful things which were seen by everybody? Our clergy and politicians handed him over to the Romans to be tried and executed. We hoped he was going to be our national liberator. All this happened three days ago now. But some women we know have come up with a very surprising story. They visited the grave early this morning and found that the body was gone. They came back and told us they had seen messengers from God who said that Jesus was alive. Then some friends of ours went to the grave and found it was indeed empty – but they saw no sign of Jesus.”***

**Then Jesus said, “*How could you be so dim? How long is it going to take before you piece together the clues in the old books? Don’t you know the passages which speak about the way God’s Chosen would suffer before becoming famous?”* Then Jesus began to explain how the words of Moses and all the other speakers from God in days gone by pointed to himself.**

**As they came near to the village, Jesus walked on as if he intended to continue his journey. But the two wouldn’t hear of it. They insisted, “*You must stay at our place. It is nearly night; there’s no light left for travelling’.”***

**Jesus accepted the invitation. When they were having supper, Jesus took a piece of bread, said ‘thank you’ to God, broke it and handed it to them. AT THAT MOMENT THEY REALIZED WHO HE WAS. Then he left them. They talked to one another about it and said, “*What a wonderful experience that was! How he cheered us up on that walk together! We understood the old books for the first time!”*  They went out again straightaway and walked back to Jerusalem. They found a gathering of all the close friends of Jesus. The two were told, *It’s true, the Leader’s come back to life. Peter’s seen him!***

**Then they told the others how they had met Jesus on the road and how they had recognized him when he broke the bread.**

Silent reflection

**Hymn 308 (STF) On the journey to Emmaus (Marty Haugen)**

1 On the journey to Emmaus with our hearts cold as stone –

 the one who would save us had left us alone

 Then a stranger walks with us and to our surprise

 he opens our stories and opens our eyes.

2 And our hearts burned within us as we talked on the way,

 how all that was promised was ours on that day.

 So we begged him, ‘Stay with us and grant us your word’.

 We welcomed the stranger and we welcomed the Lord.

3 And that evening at the table as he blessed and broke bread,

 we saw it was Jesus risen from the dead;

 though he vanished before us we knew he was near –

 the life in our dying and the hope in our fear.

4 On our journey to Emmaus, in our stories and feast,

 with Jesus we claim that the greatest is least:

 and his words burn within us – let none be ignored –

 who welcomes the stranger shall welcome the Lord.

**Sermon: Walking towards the sunrise**

I remember when I was minister here forty –odd years ago preaching on this passage in Luke’s gospel. At the end of the service John Shaw (who some of you will remember) said to me as he and his wife were leaving, ‘You know Warren, we are not walking towards the sunset, but towards the sunrise’. I’ve never forgotten that word of wisdom which helped me to see this great story with fresh eyes. That is the end of the story – but we have to ask, ‘what journey had those two disciples made before they reached their front door?

1 It was a journey which began with **faithfulness.** They had been involved in the story of Jesus of Nazareth. They had trusted him just as the other disciples,

Peter, Andrew, Thomas and the rest. During the last meal he shared with them Jesus had said, ‘you are the ones who have continued with me in my trials’.

Not only the last week. His whole ministry had been a rocky road. They had stayed with him even when they didn’t understand. They had put all their eggs in his basket! Now it seemed as if the whole enterprise had sunk without trace when he died on the cross. Their whole world had caved in.‘We had pinned all our hopes on him..’ They had followed because they trusted him. In spite of all their doubts and fears they had been faithful. The story of the generations who have lived, worshipped and served God in this chapel through good times and bad is one of **faithfulness.** Not fidelity to bricks and mortar alone but to the truth of God’s good news in Jesus. They are part of who we are and we remember them with gratitude today.

2 It is also a story of **failure.**  The Emmaus pair walked into the gathering gloom as members of a band of women and men whose Messiah had failed and who at the critical moment had failed him. One of their number had betrayed him, another had denied him, the rest had simply deserted. Part of the story of the church down the centuries has been one of failure, of betrayal and denial.

Peter is the Rock because he made the vow, even though he failed. In his failure he learned the meaning of grace and forgiveness. In this re-discovery the Church is renewed. Also those two travellers were in the grip of **fear.** Fear for themselves, their families their friends. Because of their association with the crucified Jesus they faced possible persecution, arrest and death. What kind of future can we look forward to now? During this time of lockdown as the Coronavirus spreads, there is fear among us. What will happen if we become infected? Or family members, friends? What does the future hold for our children and grandchildren? What they find in conversation with the stranger is a clue to the meaning of it all in the larger purpose of God. Life out of death, light out of darkness, hope out of despair, transformation out of chaos.

3. What had not been defeated in the hearts and minds of those grieving disciples was human kindness and generosity expressed in **hospitality** to this stranger. It reminds us of the three strangers who turned up at the tent of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:1-5) when they were running out of food and seemed to have no future. It was the giving of hospitality which opened the door to the renewal of promise.

A village chapel was on the point of closure as they approached their 150th anniversary. They had decided that the service which marked that anniversary would be the last. At the meeting to plan for that ending, a stranger walked through the door. He was welcomed even though nobody knew him. He and his wife had come recently to live in the village and had heard about plans to close the chapel. He wondered if he might be of some help. He suggested that on the weekend, an exhibition of the church’s history, with photographs and memorabilia be arranged. He had experience and would help. Why not invite everyone in the village to come and see, and give an opportunity to anyone to make suggestions. What could the chapel offer to the community today and tomorrow? Suddenly the mood in the meeting changed. Out of that weekend came the formation of a weekly art class; a Monday morning coffee and chat group open to all; a brownie pack finding a place to meet on Friday nights. Later a kitchen and toilet block was added enabling the chapel to be a kind of community centre in the village.

Today, over 30 years later the chapel is still open for worship and community service. It was the welcomed stranger who made it happen. Eyes were opened to possibilities for the future not seen before.

Strangers are all around us. In this multi-coloured society, perhaps the future of this or any other church today depends on a willingness to welcome strangers and to be open to the gifts they bring. ‘Then, as he broke the bread, their eyes were opened and they recognized him.’ It was Jesus himself who said: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me. When you welcomed one of these. ‘he least of my brothers/sisters you made me welcome’ Or as a Celtic rune of hospitality puts it:

 ‘Says the lark in her song..

 Often, often, often

 Comes the Christ in the stranger’s guise’

So we face the future with hope as followers of the risen Jesus, which is maybe what John Shaw was getting at when he said all those years ago,

***We’re not walking towards the sunset. We’re walking towards the sunrise’***

**Silence**

**Prayers of concern**

**During this time of lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic**

May we who are merely inconvenienced remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors remember those most vulnerable

May we who have the luxury of working from home

Remember those who choose between preserving their health or

Paying their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when schools close

Remember those who have no such options

May we who have to cancel our trips remember those with no safe place to go

May we who settle in for quarantine at home remember those who have no home

As fear threatens to grip our country let us choose love

During this time when we cannot physically hug each other

Let us find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbours.

Amen

**(Prayers from the Corrymeela Community, Northern Ireland)**

This service was to include a celebration of Holy Communion.

At this point you may like to light a candle place it on a table

together with a piece of bread on a small plate and as you break

it recall the words of Jesus who is present among us, meets

us on every road, unites us with our friends here and with

those everywhere who are part of the living Body of Christ and who celebrate with us on this day of resurrection. If there is more than one member of your household present share the bread between you.

**Jesus said : I am the Bread of Life. Take this bread and remember me**

 **Eat this bread, my body broken, so that you and this fractured**

 **world might be made whole.**

**The prayer of Jesus:**

 **Our Father hallowed be your name,**

 **Your kingdom come**

 **Your will be done on earth as in heaven.**

 **Give us today our daily bread.**

 **Forgive us our sins**

 **As we forgive those who sin against us**

 **Save us in the time of trial**

 **And deliver us from evil.**

 **For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,**

 **Now and forever. Amen.**

**Hymn: Thine be the glory (313STF) Edmund Budry**

1 Thine be the glory risen conquering son

 Endless is the victory thou o’er death hast won;

 Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,

 Kept the folded grave-cloths where thy body lay:

 *Thine be the glory risen conquering son*

 *Endless is the victory thou o’er death hast won.*

 2 Lo Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb

 Lovingly he greets us scatters fear and gloom

 Let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing

 For her Lord now liveth death has lost its sting.

3 No more we doubt thee, glorious prince of life

 Life is naught without thee, aid us in our strife

 Make us more than conquerors through thy deathless love

 Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.

**Blessing**

Loving God by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead

Strengthen us to walk with him in his risen life and may God, spirit, son and father bless us today tomorrow and always . **Amen**

Alleluia! Go in joy and peace to love and serve the Lord .

**In the name of Christ. Alleluia**