

Third Sunday of Easter 2023, Year A, Luke 24.13-35, The Road to Emmaus

On this 17th Sunday of the calendar year, this Third Sunday of Easter, on this Second Sunday of our 2023 Stewardship campaign entitled *'Stewardship: Time, Talent and Treasure - A way of living'* my first thoughts turn to our being fifteen days into the great season of Easter, this joyful Eastertide, during which we remind ourselves of and celebrate Jesus' rising from the dead, His Resurrection. How has this Eastertide been for you so far? Has it been joyful? Has it taken away fear? Have you known peace? The peace that only God can give and does give in Jesus Christ. Has your heart danced for joy? Have you sung praises to the Author of Life as the psalmist writes? (Psalm 28.9)

Our readings each touch on Easter. In the Acts of the Apostles we read, 'God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.' In 1 Peter we read, 'Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God...' And from Luke's gospel we heard, "'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they (the Emmaus disciples) told what had happened on the road, and how the Lord had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread."

To be in, to indwell, to inhabit Easter is something most will need to learn. Since Easter Day the world has quickly moved on putting Easter aside as it hurtles forwards to the next thing whatever that next thing might be. This Easter season, lasting forty days and fifty according to the new calendar, being our joyous commemoration of Christ's resurrection from the dead isn't a holiday, but thinking about going on holiday might help us to appreciate something of what I am seeking to impart.

Cartoons might depict a man or a woman on an island lying sprawled out in a deck chair under a palm tree and an umbrella, the sun high in the sky, with the man possibly smoking a pipe and the woman holding a cocktail in her hand. Both wearing shades, sun glasses. Perhaps with a book lying face down by their side or with a newspaper in their lap. These persons are inhabiting their holidays. The image conjured up provides an idea of what I am attempting. How do we inhabit Easter not only in the season of Easter, but throughout the year and indeed throughout our lives. Easter is different from being on holiday. How can we acknowledge this new reality of being in Christ through his death and his resurrection, our baptism into him. How can we be His new creation? How can we live this eighth day of creation? Can stewardship help? Is it a way of living?

To be in Easter is to acknowledge with joy and gratitude as well as with sincerity of heart and mind that “No more we fear death’s ancient dread, in Christ arisen from the dead.” These words “No more we fear death’s ancient dread, in Christ arisen from the dead” are taken from the last hymn we sang last Sunday, as we went back into the world. It is for this reason, he is risen, so that we live to God and not to ourselves. This too must be learnt. During Easter we are being called upon as we were at the beginning of today’s service to put away all malice and evil (cf 1 Corinthians 5.7,8) and one must add mischief. Paul writes elsewhere, ‘Put away all anger and bitterness, all slander and malice.’ (cf Ephesians 4.30 – 5.1) Paul warns against gossips and busybodies. To indwell Easter is to put away all that is contrary to God’s will while making plenteous room for Christ alone to rule in our hearts and minds. Imagining our response as a four part harmony the tenor is joy. The bass is gratitude. The soprano is lightness of being that comes with knowing Jesus risen from the dead, ‘For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ The alto line the love that humbles itself.

I hope the above gives you some little idea of what is meant when speaking about presently living in, being in, resting in, inhabiting Eastertide. It is time to borrow a phrase of John Henry Newman's. Eastertide is a time during which the busy world is hushed. That it doesn't always work out like that I have known during the past week or so during which I was scolded for pressing ahead with the stewardship campaign. It was and it is important to see that how we order our resources, how we manage our lives as Christians, Christian lives, is always based first on what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, which brings with it a deep sense of gratitude filled with joy. Our future in Christ is secure. We need no longer fear the ancient dread, but rather in the words of another hymn, 'songs of thankfulness and praise, Jesu, Lord, to thee we raise...' or in some words from the letter to the Hebrews, 'By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place.' (Hebrews 10:20)

Stewardship is straightforward once you know what the word stewardship means. A steward was traditionally someone employed in a large household or estate to manage domestic affairs. A steward was someone entrusted with overseeing the right ordering of the various assets of the estate. The steward is not the owner, but someone who is entrusted with the owner's goods. We often say as we will today, all things come from you, of your own do we give you. What we have which comes from God we hold in trust. Why? Because it is the Lord's. We are the Lord's. We are his people knowing that he cares for us as Jesus teaches, Even all the hairs on our head are counted, so do not be afraid. (Matthew 10:30)

We are invited during a stewardship campaign to think of our lives as a household that needs ordering. And the ordering of this our household brings freedom. In terms of Christian stewardship it is about how we manage our response to God, who gives us life, gives us faith, showers blessings upon us removing from us the fear of death and the

dominion of sin that we might live to God and not to ourselves. Living to God is also something that needs to be learnt. The good ordering of our lives can help us. Stewardship is about living to God and not about living to ourselves. It is about ordering our support for the local church well. There are three categories that we must always be giving attention to as circumstances change: time, talent and treasure. All three require our attention. It is only to the extent that the Body of Christ through its individual members, who are all members of the one body in this place, gives of itself that we become a lively community and hopefully always through God's grace working in us a life-giving community in Jesus' name.

After the service Ben will outline our financial needs and our current position inviting everyone who is a member of, a friend of, an associate of, a supporter of Christ Church to review their giving in light of our mission, ministry and outreach as a local church community. There is the treasure, the money we need to maintain what we are presently doing and the treasure, the money we need to realise those aspirations that we still have, muted as they be, to strengthen our ministry with a person or persons who can help build up a youth ministry, as well as a student ministry.

I shan't dwell on the finances as Ben will, important as they are, as this year the focus is on time and talent. Suffice it to say everyone should come onto the planning giving scheme, whether they are in church or not, everyone should review their giving and be looking to increase it. I am reminded of words from the passion. The Lord has need of it. (Luke 19:34) The Lord has need of your thoughtful response. And each should make a response. A commitment. The churchwardens and I, as well as the members of the council are immensely grateful to Ben for being treasurer. Life despite supposedly getting easier is actually getting more and more complicated.

When a Christian gives, he or she is giving back, aware of God's steadfast love, mercy and compassion made manifest in Jesus Christ. The God who makes himself known through his creation, his life-giving Son and through the giving of the Holy Spirit, to encourage, to build up and that we might be bold in his name preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ in and out of season.

Time is precious and talents many more than we can number. Occasionally I see flashes of this as when Karen came forward and took on the building of the Easter gardens in the church and in the garden. When Dorette came forward and baked delicious cupcakes and maroons or when Ann continues to make the simnel cake or Herbert and Vivian arrange the flowers. Equally when I see just how many give regularly. How Ian continues to go to book fairs to obtain books that can be sold on behalf of the church or Diana and her happy band of volunteers performing small wonders in the shop week by week. And then those many, little acts of service that remain unseen. There is Rose's ministry of keeping in touch with people. The visits Beverley keeps up with long term members of Christ Church. Cecil standing in for sidespersons. Emmanuel helping members of the community. Peter as he schlepped tables back and forth to the garden so that we could enjoy fellowship in Corona times. John and Irene and others providing little meals after the evening service. James Mehrdad providing fresh bread week by week. Lola always ready to help with coffee after the service. Sunday and Lindsey serving week by week. Sidespersons, readers, intercessors, choir members... Those serving on committees and on the council. Churchwardens, archdeaconry representatives, council members... The weekly LivingLight Blog... the people manning the console for streaming... On and on we go... And we are grateful... Grateful for God, who gives birth to a church that knows Christ is risen from the dead.

How can the many gifts that are embedded in this congregation be harnessed to the mission of Christ Church, our calling and our sending, that Jesus' words, my yoke is easy and my burden is light ring true? (Matthew 11:30) That no one carries more than they can carry and no one gives more than they are willing to give, because the biblical phrase rings true 'The Lord loves a cheerful giver' of their time and talent in the service of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 9:7) Bitterness is the enemy of the Christian and its sting is deadly for the soul. I pray that all bitterness may be removed from us.

Today's focus is on how our ministries relate to the local church of which we are members and for which each one of us individually has responsibility, while acknowledging that there are other ministries beyond the local church that include those whom we love, those God has entrusted to us and how to we live our Christian lives at the workplace. How does Sunday transition into Monday? Some grasp this and live it. Some know this is true, but are not stepping up or the response is piecemeal, rather reluctantly. Where is the cheerful giver? And others don't know that they even have a responsibility because no one ever taught them. In words inspired by JFK, "Ask not what your church can do for you – ask what you can do for your church." Hence this short and sharp campaign and the need to promote it within Christ church liberally.

Let me share with you something from my treasure trove of faith. I have come to believe inspired by God's word in Scripture that as the wine and meat, the loaves and fishes were multiplied, so too can the gifts given to us and by us be multiplied by God. This liberal giving is made possible by the security and the warmth God makes real in a people truly gathered in his name living to God. Therefore accountability is important and at the ACM we will give an account of our activities. Whether we are gathered in a field or on a hill in Galilee or around a table/altar in a church in the third district built by a former generation of Christians. God multiplies if we remain faithful and truthful. And so we thank you Lord

for those who had the vision, the nous, the wherewithal, the ability to build and maintain this church. Some here have been a part of maintaining the building and others the building up our community for the last six months, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years and more.

Numerous are our responsibilities: family, work, friends, church, rest, leisure to name the most important. What needs spelling out is that the church, the local church, is not an also-ran, but rather on par with the others, as vital to our well-being as the others. Our commitment of time and talent to our local church is not something we should take lightly, as if it didn't matter. Again some words from Scripture make the point. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:13, NIV)

What must we learn? I began by saying, not as well as I should have wished, that as Christians we must learn to abide in Easter so that Christ may easter in us so that in the days of darkness joy remains. We must learn to order our lives that we may live to God and not to ourselves. We need to learn how best to order our lives with regard to the local Christian community of which we are a part. How best to steward, order our lives in response to God. We have numerous responsibilities, but one of them is this, not an also-ran, our local church the Body of Christ made manifest. How will we respond? How will we show our gratitude leavened with joy as Christ easters in us as we give attention to how much of our time, talent and treasure we are willing to give cheerfully. Stewardship, Christian stewardship, the good ordering of our lives is indeed - a way of life.