

Acts 2.14a,36-41

1 Peter 1.17-23

Gospel Luke 24.13-35

It is so good to see you all this morning. Thank you so much for all your prayers and support while I've been doing the Coast to Coast walk to raise money for the spire. With Gift Aid we have raised over £14,000. It is traditional on the Coast to Coast to take a stone from St Bees in Cumbria and throw it in the sea at Robin Hood's Bay. I took a pink stone which reminded me of the pink marble on the floor of St John's. It felt as if I was carrying you all with me. I know some of you have been carrying some heavy burdens yourselves and I have been praying for you. But I also felt that I was being carried by you. That you walked with me as Jesus walked with Cleopas and his companion. I want to say particular thanks to Alison for all she has done while I've been away with help from Malcolm. To Cathy who has been my project manager, social media adviser and personal physician as well as a wonderful support. To Claire Webber who has helped so much with comms. To Alan who accompanied me for my last two days, at some cost to his feet. It was lovely to have Pauline and also Debbie Timms at the finish. And I want to thank Emily and Sarah who thought it would be a good idea for me to do the coast to coast. If I show any further signs of having a midlife crisis, please would somebody stage an intervention?

I've spent quite a bit of the past two weeks on my own so I hope you will indulge me if I'm more than usually introspective. I have had a very strange Easter. In a way I haven't really had Easter at all. I developed Norovirus after the Maundy Thursday service which meant that I missed Good Friday, Easter Eve and Easter Day. We also had to miss out on two family gatherings. I was just about better by Easter Monday which meant that we could go and start the walk on the Tuesday as planned. But I've also had a chest infection, an eye infection, blisters and gammy knees so it's felt a bit as if my Lenten pilgrimage just carried on. I certainly experienced the odd temptation during my walk. To thumb a lift, catch a bus, even give up sometimes. Don't worry, I didn't succumb. I walked the whole 192 miles.

But I didn't begin my walk in the best frame of mind. For the first time in my ministry I'd missed Easter and I wasn't quite sure what to make of that. And the story of the road to Emmaus was a real gift to me. The road from Jerusalem to Emmaus is about seven miles long. About a third of some of my days. And as I walked along,

it wasn't hard to imagine Jesus walking with me. Not fully recognised but there. And as I thought about my Easter, or lack of it, I felt Jesus' gentle challenge. Cleopas and his companion, who was perhaps Mary, his wife, had been pondering their recent experiences when they met Jesus. Things had not turned out in the way that they had imagined. The words 'We had hoped stand out' for me. 'We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.' Cleopas and Mary had imagined a different outcome but their world had been turned upside down.

As vicar of St John's, it is my job to make sure that Easter happens. That services take place. That the Easter candle is lit. That the resurrection is proclaimed. But at a deeper, more personal level, resurrection is not something I can control or dictate. The original resurrection was completely unexpected, unplanned. It turned things upside down. And maybe God had to turn my world upside down a bit in order for resurrection to really break in to my life. I'm a bit of a control freak and sometimes God has to break through that in order to really speak to me. That's how I first felt a call to ministry. And this time I found I needed to listen afresh to Jesus as he walked with me.

And perhaps you have had that sense of Jesus breaking through things that you have taken for granted. Upending old certainties so that new life can come forth. It's not always comfortable but Jesus walks alongside us on the journey, showing us the way. Opening our eyes to new life, new ways of seeing things.

Cleopas and Mary had heard that some of the women had gone to the tomb that Easter morning and found it empty. The women had said that they had seen a vision of angels. But Cleopas and Mary had not yet experienced the resurrection for themselves. It was only a rumour that they were still trying to get their head around. I have seen lots of signs of spring and new life on my travels. New lambs. Blackthorn in flower. Clouds of golden daffodils in the Lake District. Violets, bluebells and wood anemones. Nature has been reverberating with the good news of resurrection but for me there was always something missing. Something incomplete.

I have really appreciated the hospitality of others as I've gone on my journey. On day one, a nice lady offered me some hot Vimto. I declined, thinking that there was a coffee shop up ahead. I was wrong. Later, John and Alison, the parents of Hannah in our choir, had us round for dinner and John and two other friends walked with me for a day which was wonderful. It is often in other people that we experience Christ. And it is no

accident that it was when Cleopas and his companion invited the stranger to break bread with them, that they finally recognised him as the risen Jesus.

And that's one of the big things I have learned from the past two weeks. Though the Coast to Coast has been a great experience, my calling is to be a parish priest. To be in this place. To serve you. It is in you that I fully recognise the risen Jesus. You are all Christ for me and I know that you are the risen Christ for lots of other people too. And just as Cleopas and Mary had to race back to tell the other disciples, so I couldn't wait to come back to be with you here in Ranmoor. I haven't received Communion since Maundy Thursday and that's sort of been on purpose as well as a matter of practicality. Today is my Easter. Today the risen Christ is made known in the breaking of the bread. Amen.