

April 26<sup>th</sup> 2020 Sermon for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Easter –

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### **Collect for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter**

Risen Christ, You filled our disciples with boldness and fresh hope;

Strengthen us to proclaim your risen life and fill us with your peace;

To the glory of God the Father. Amen

**Bible Reading** Acts 2:14a, 36-41

**Gospel Reading** Luke 24:13-35

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now I don't know how many of you regularly travel on trains but as I don't drive, I tend to use them quite a lot. And whenever I do, I normally reserve a seat with a table so that I can use the time to work, usually on my laptop. Now the benefit of this is that you have space to work, the downside for me at least is that it means there is a strong chance you will be sitting with three strangers. Now my preference is always to try and get a table seat in the Quiet Zone. It almost guarantees that you will be surrounded by other people keen simply to work in peace and quiet. And if I'm honest I hate being disturbed when I'm working and I'm also not a huge fan of talking to strangers. So that is the ideal scenario.

But sometimes when booking you have a decision to make because the Quiet Zone is full, no tables free. And so you either take a normal seat there giving you the peace and quiet but no real space to work, or you take a table seat in a normal carriage where you are likely to encounter a whole host of different distractions. Now I normally always go still for a table seat, because I have a secret weapon, one of my most prized possessions, and that is 'noise-cancelling headphones'. But I tend to find that even equipped with these it seems, from my own experience at least, it is impossible not to find yourself engaged in a conversation with someone around you when you are sitting there. Now you're getting quite an insight into me here. But there are things you can try to do to show that you do not want to engage in conversation with someone. The main one is 'don't make eye contact'. Once you do you have engaged with that person, and even for that brief half a second you have made a human connection and opened the door to conversation. The other trick is to quickly try to get out your work and highlight to those around you that you have things to do and don't want to be disturbed.

You might be able to tell that I have some practice with all this and I should say now as well I'm never wearing a Collar in these occasions. Yet knowing all this, and taking the steps which I do, the most likely scenario is still that you end up in a conversation. And almost always they are amazing encounters with another person. Sometimes it's the privilege of hearing their story or sometimes its being prompted to share part of my own. I've had times when I've sat down and in my head I'm saying 'please don't talk to me, please don't talk to me' desperately trying to avoid eye contact with anyone, and yet deep down know it's inevitable that a person will talk to me and it happens just as I've got out my laptop that they

say “can I ask you something?” and with that the door swings wide open. Whatever plans I had for that time fly out the window and instead I’m in an encounter where almost always I end up leaving thinking how precious that time was. So you may wonder after all I’ve said, why I’m so reluctant to talk to others in these moments of the majority of experiences have been overwhelmingly positive. But I think its just something of my character. In these moments I feel trapped. I have to go where I am going, and I can’t get off the train, and so for however long the journey is meant to be I have to be there. It feels like there is no escape and I want that time for myself. And yet I know that once I’m in a conversation with someone, then the compassion and love side of me will take over, so that however long is needed on that journey, I will be there for that person. And so, I know that in that moment I’m giving up the time I had wanted for myself. Because I would always prefer to be left with my own thoughts and work but my faith constantly drags me away from this preference and instead, I have encounters with other people. Many people I am sure have similar experiences and most Christians would highlight that this is part of the mystery of the work of the Holy Spirit as it gently brings us into encounters where we can show and share love and compassion with those whom we meet.

And so when I read the story we have just heard about the road to Emmaus, I like to imagine that the two disciples are like me. That here they are on a journey that they have to take, that they have things to do, that they really really don’t want to be bothered. If they could they would be in the Quiet Zone. Because for them everything is a mess at this point. Jesus is dead. Some of the group are having crazy ideas that they’ve seen angels. So I imagine what they want is time to be by themselves with their own thoughts. And yet in the distance they see someone, and I imagine that they are saying to each other ‘please, please, don’t let that person come near us. Don’t let them catch up to us. Of all the times, now is the time we really don’t want to have to engage with a stranger.’

But as they go on a bit, the person gets nearer. And as they go a bit further the person gets nearer still and there’s a sense of inevitability that for the disciples, whether they like it or not, this stranger is going to talk to them, perhaps for the rest of the journey. And then to make matters worse, the stranger when they arrive asks what they are talking about. Now this must have been the type of question which would have been so blindingly obvious because there was only one News story that week, which was the death of Jesus. And so in that moment the disciples must have thought ‘what on earth have we got ourselves into here?’ But their fears were misplaced because instead they have an amazing encounter with the risen Jesus.

But the thing I find best about this story is what they say to each other after Jesus has gone. They say “Were not our hearts burning within us?” “Were not our hearts burning within us?” Encounters with Jesus are always matters of the heart. They are encounters of love and compassion, mercy and forgiveness. They are encounters where we feel like our hearts are burning within us so strong is the love received from them. These disciples had an incredible journey of encounter, where their hearts burned within them. And the wonderful truth is that that type of encounter is open to us too. Jesus is with us too. It may just like the disciples take time for us to realise it, but Jesus is here. Sometimes it just requires us to take the time to listen and recognise.

So I have a challenge for you all this week. Take the time to sit with Jesus. Make a cup of tea or a coffee and sit with Jesus. Open up to him. Share with him. Let him know your hopes, your joys, your fears. Let him speak to you. Take time to realise just how much God loves you, and journey into that love. Go deeper into it. Because God loves you as you are. God loves you for who you are. And there is nothing we can do to change or alter that love, it is everlasting and never ending. And so take time this week to journey into the amazingness of that love, with Jesus. Perhaps if you are able, you might want to use your one outside bit of exercise to have a walk, and give that walk to spending time with Jesus. Walk with Jesus like the disciples did on the road to Emmaus, perhaps you want to take time to look at the trees, the grass, the flowers, the wildlife. Take time to see the beauty of creation and talk to Jesus about it. See how the breeze gently interacts with everything around. See how the different colours stand alone and blend into one when we see them. Take time to see what Jesus might be showing us in each of these moments. Because we need to take time to feed the fire in our heart by spending time with Jesus, because when we do our hearts burn within us. And if our hearts are burning then they are giving out warmth to those around us. People can feel it, perhaps not in a physical way but in a spiritual way. And at a time like this when we are stuck in our homes with limited journeys outside, we need more than ever to be spending time working on the fires in our hearts. We need more than ever to be stoking the fires of love through time spent with Jesus.

I believe that despite all the outward signs that I might give off on my train journeys, that the reason I continually have encounters with people, is because there is a warmth in my heart which people might not realise, but they can feel. That they start a conversation with me and not the other people around because they feel that warmth. And that warmth is not mine, it is Jesus' who, as a Christian, I have invited to dwell in my heart. And so it is Jesus who stokes that fire and gives out the warmth. And it is Jesus who reaches out and seeks to have an encounter with that person. I am simply a vessel. And the joy of being a Christian is that we have all agreed to be a vessel of God's love. We have signed up to be Jesus' hands and feet so that people can encounter something of Jesus' love through our humble acts of compassion and kindness. And so we shouldn't think at this time that that role stops. Instead we can continue to grow the fires in our hearts by letting Jesus in more and more. We can grow the fires so that people on their walks feel the warmth of love as they pass by our houses. We can grow the fires that the warmth is felt down the end of the telephone line. We can grow the fires so the warmth is felt to those two metres away from us. And we can grow the fires so the warmth is felt by those whom we love but cannot visit. And we can grow the fires so that when the time comes and we meet again in one place, that the intensity and heat from that gathering will draw people far and wide into the embrace of God's amazing love.

Brothers and sisters, now is the time, more than ever, for us to show the world that Jesus lives. And that he lives in each and every one of our hearts, burning so brightly that even our own selfishness, weakness or faults, like when I'm on a train, can't even stop it. Brothers and sisters, now is the time to set your hearts ablaze by spending time with the living Lord Jesus who died and lives to show us that nothing can stop love from burning bright in this world. And so my prayer today is that wherever you are you would have an encounter and feel the presence of the living God with you, so that afterwards you too might exclaim "were not our hearts burning within us". Amen.