

Homily. 3rd Sunday of Easter. Year. A. 22/23 April 2023.

We often think that Jesus came to fulfil our expectations about God, but that's only partially true. What Jesus really came to do was to fulfil God's plans, expectations and promises to us and in doing so change our minds and hearts about God. St. Luke's much loved story tells us about this.

We meet two depressed disciples walking away from Jerusalem on the 1st Easter day. They'd left the community of disciples behind them and were headed off back home to Emmaus. They'd seen their Lord and Teacher arrested, tried unjustly and horribly die on Friday. In the rush to have him taken down from the Cross before sunset, the beginning of the solemn Jewish sabbath, they knew that his side had been lanced open and that he'd then been entombed. Over the next 24 hours nothing happened because nothing could as their sabbath day demanded rest, silence and prayer. Then, that Sunday morning some women, confused they'd assumed, had come telling them a mumbo jumbo story that he had risen, but when the men checked they found only an empty tomb.

What they'd imagined was going to happen was that Jesus would triumph over the powers of his time, set up a new God fearing rule and restore Israel to the glory of its former times. Of course, they'd also thought that they, his disciples, would end up playing a key role in his reign. None of this had occurred, so for these two disciples at least, it was all over and done with and with expectations unmet, they'd decided to head off home.

It was on this road back to their old life that a stranger appeared and walked beside them. He listened to their story first, a story of defeat and

loss. Of course they didn't recognise him. How could they, for they were looking at the ground and the dust, not the trees and the sky? They could only see their own pain and unmet expectations, not the new creation that God was doing, not even the living Lord walking with them. How often have we felt the same, looking down and inwards, not upwards and out?

So, after spilling their sorrows in his ear the stranger finally spoke saying that they were being foolish, having only part the story, we're missing the finale and were mostly wrong. He then set about joining up the dots for them, making sense of loss, defeat, sacrifice and even death as ways that God works. Then, a burning inside them began, a flicker of Easter hope, a flame of faith rekindled. Yet, it would only be at the meal and the breaking of the bread, the Eucharistic sign of his body broken for them and his life given for them and to them, that they saw him, and then he vanished.

Despite nightfall, with no lights about to guide them but one afire within them, they immediately headed back to the community. Only with the other disciples present was the resurrection truth confirmed, God's plans and expectations had been fulfilled. Then, on Easter night, they added their own experience of the to that of the wise women and Simon Peter.

From here, where to then for us? Well, that depends on where we're looking; downwards and in at ourselves, at our losses and at the sadness and suffering we observe in this world; or upwards and out towards the Risen Lord who is with us on our journey, his victory renewing us and all of creation as God intends? Do we see him rising with us now in our community? Do we feel him burning within us in the Word of God? Do we make his living presence and Spirit our own in the breaking of the bread?

Or do we just keep on walking through the years of our lives, the foolish way home, with only part of the real story having been taken in, missing the point that our hopes have already been fulfilled as only God can?