

19th April 2026 – Morning Service

Emmaus Road

Megan Ashmore

Call to Worship

The set gospel reading for this third Sunday in Easter actually takes us back to the evening of the first Easter day. It is the account of the travellers on the road to Emmaus and includes this phrase: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

Our call to worship reflects the thoughts and feelings of the travellers:

How glorious it is to hear of Jesus’ resurrection.

At his death, our hearts cried out and we felt lost.

But he comes to us and walks with us, even now.

In the holy word, in the music, in the prayers, he is present with us.

Open your hearts to the Lord.

Lord, help us really be ready to receive you into our lives, that our hearts too may burn. **Amen.**

Nancy Townley – Ministry Matters

Let us confess our belief in the risen Lord as we sing.

StF 348 – He is Lord

1) He is Lord, he is Lord;

He is risen from the dead, and he is Lord;
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord.

2) He is King, he is King;

He will draw all nations to him, he is King;
And the time shall be when the world shall sing
That Jesus Christ is King.

3) He is love, he is love;

He has shown us by his life that he is love;
All his people sing with one voice of joy
That Jesus Christ is love.

4) He is life, he is life;

He has died to set us free and he is life;
And he calls us all to live evermore,
For Jesus Christ is life.

Anonymous

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Jesus, you are indeed Lord, King, love and life. You are Lord of earth and heaven; of sun and rain; of mountains and valleys; of straight roads and twisty paths. You are King of glory; king of peace; king of justice and joy and of your kingdom there is no end. You are love – unbounded; unconditional; faithful and sacrificial. You are life in all its fulness. You are life eternal.

Thank you for bringing all that into our lives through your birth, death, resurrection and ascension. Today as we worship in your presence, we acknowledge that it is only by your grace that we are blessed and not through anything we ourselves have done.

And so, we ask forgiveness for the times we have sought to take the glory; the times we have taken your love and the gift of life for granted; the times when we have imposed limits on your love; neglected to demonstrate kingdom values; doubted your presence or made worldly possessions our Lord.

In your mercy you went to the cross and bore the price of our wrongdoing. And you rose again to defeat the power of death and its hold on us, that we might have the freedom to follow you and be raised with you to eternal life.

Thank you Jesus. Thank you Jesus. Thank you Lord for loving me. **Amen.**

StF 332 – Lord, I lift your name on high

Lord, I lift your name on high;
Lord, I love to sing your praises.
I'm so glad you're in my life;
I'm so glad you came to save us.

You came from heaven to earth
to show the way,
from the earth to the cross,
my debt to pay.
from the cross to the grave,
from the grave to the sky,
Lord, I lift your name on high.

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Introduction to the Reading

On 1st April, Rev Michael led a group of walkers around the circuit in his annual Holy Week walk – a route of sixteen miles which took us to each of the churches in the circuit. A core group of people completed the whole walk, but throughout the day many other church members and friends accompanied them for part of the distance. At each church we enjoyed a short rest with refreshments and listened to a bible reading and short reflection. Though this was the fourth time I had taken part, each occasion has been different – the second year took a different route; another time my walking companion and I were so engaged in conversation that we lost sight of the rest of the group, took the wrong path and had to ring for guidance as to how to get back on track; and last year Luke brought us vests to wear for safety and identity, and holding crosses to carry for the journey that day and for the rest of our journey with God. Though different, each year has offered plenty of opportunity for witness and contemplative reflection as we have walked sometimes in silence, sometimes in deep conversation.

As I walked this year, I had the account of the travellers on the Emmaus Road in mind. How did the walks compare? Well, I set out that morning with enthusiasm and excitement. They set out with grief and despair. I was walking out of choice – going on an adventure. They were walking because it was their only means of returning home – the end of their adventure. I was walking in the light of the risen Lord. They were walking in the shadow of the cross. And yet, at the end of the walks we were in the same place – sharing fellowship over food in the presence of Jesus – the living word.

Reading: Luke 24: 13-35 (NRSV)

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So

he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Reflection

There was one more difference between the Holy Week walk and the trek to Emmaus. When I had finished walking, I just wanted to go home, eat a great pile of chips and go to bed. But Cleopas and his companion, having returned home, turned round and walked straight back from whence they had come. Admittedly they had not walked as far as us – the distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus is about seven miles. But it was late in the day – the roads would have been difficult to navigate, and dangerous in the darkness. So, what made them go at that late hour? The obvious reason is that they had met the risen Lord and wanted others to know. But I think it was more than just wanting to share the news of the encounter.

Our son, Toby, was born at 2.52am. Keen as we were to share the news with our family, it wasn't appropriate to ring them at that time in the morning. So, for a few hours, Stuart and I were the only ones who knew Toby was born. It was a special time for us. If the two travellers merely wanted to tell people they had met Jesus, the risen Lord, they too might have waited until morning – a more suitable time. I think it was the conversation that did it.

As the two companions talked about the events in Jerusalem, so Jesus realised they had missed the point of his sacrificial death – as many had – as many do! These two disciples were not of the inner circle. They hadn't shared the most intimate experiences that the twelve had. They'd no doubt heard Jesus's wonderful stories, seen miracles and participated in the group discussions, but they wouldn't have been party to the deepest longings of Jesus' heart; nor the sorrow he displayed for those who turned away from him; nor would they recognise him as the suffering servant.

So, Jesus continued his ministry, even then, as he opened up the scripture to them. Ruth Burgess, a member of the Iona Community, has written a monologue about this conversation as told by Jesus. Part of it goes like this:

As I'd guessed, they were talking about what had happened to me in Jerusalem. They looked so sad... How little they seemed to have understood what I had taught them! I couldn't help myself. I launched into a major lecture on the scriptures, referencing all the teachings about the Messiah. I began with Moses and continued through the prophets – a seven-mile bible study! I was on a roll.

The term “denouement” is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as “the end of a story, in which everything is explained, or the end result of a situation”. Aptly applied to a mystery, it is when everything falls into place as it were. I have just read a novel by Susie Dent of Dictionary Corner on Countdown. In it a group of lexicographers find themselves with a mystery to solve. One of the characters surmises that she spends “her life uncovering secrets; that her job is to carefully dismantle language like a Russian doll until its very core is revealed, then put it back together to preserve its mystery.” I liked that description and thought it fitting for what Jesus did.

I have a set of Russian dolls, brought back from Ukraine. At its heart is a tiny figure. Around it are the hints at what lies inside. Each doll looks the same but is smaller. As each one is opened, we get a sense of what we are going to find. As Jesus opened up the scriptures the travellers began to get a sense of how it all fitted together – how one thing leads to another. We are going to sing a hymn and then spend some time

looking at what Jesus might have picked out for those disciples to focus on then and what he might point out for us today. Don't worry! It won't be a seven-mile bible study!

StF 161 – Speak O Lord

- 1) Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All your purposes, for your glory.
- 2) Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.
- 3) Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
And by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
And the earth is filled with your glory.

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Reflection

Speak O Lord – “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

Moses – the man chosen by God to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt and to establish the nation of Israel. Moses – the man with whom God spoke directly and gave the law. The man to whom God said, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.” (Deuteronomy 18:18)

Jesus – the Word of God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (John1; 1; 14)

David – the shepherd boy chosen by God to become king of Israel. David – the man to whom God said, “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7: 16)

Jesus – King of Kings. “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1: 30 – 33)

Isaiah – the prophet chosen by God to foretell the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah – the man to whom God gave the words and said, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” (Isaiah 53: 5 – 7)

Jesus – Lamb of God. “The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

One commentary I read about Jesus explaining the Scriptures to Cleopas and his companion suggests that there is a golden thread running through the whole of the Old Testament that leads us to Jesus. The writings of these early Scriptures can be difficult to read at times, but they are such a treasure store of truth, with promises of assurance, grace and faithfulness.

Imagine that road between Emmaus and Jerusalem. Where are you today?

You may be like the travellers going to Emmaus – disappointed, sorrowful, despairing. Like them you may think that Jesus doesn't know what has happened. But he does! He knows more than we know. He knows how to lead you on. So, I encourage you to take hold of that thread; to rely on God who says:

“Remember that I commanded you to be strong and brave. So don't be afraid. The Lord your God will be with you everywhere you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

“The mountains and hills may crumble, but my love for you will never end; I will keep forever my promise of peace.” (Isaiah 54: 10)

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Perhaps you are rejoicing in meeting with Jesus today. Your heart may be burning. Have you turned round and started out on the journey to share the good news? As we walked in our blue vests again this year, a couple of walkers were mistaken for volunteers with the Canal Trust. But it gave them the opportunity to tell who we were and what we were doing.

Whichever way you are walking know that Jesus walks alongside you. He is our companion the whole length of the journey. He will speak if we listen and listen if we speak. He will comfort, instruct, lead and carry us if necessary. He is not hidden from sight but alive in all creation. May we all know the joy of the risen Lord in our hearts and be willing and ready to share that joy with all we meet on the road we travel.

StF 156 – From the breaking of the dawn

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| <p>1) From the breaking of the dawn
To the setting of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
Words of power, strong to save,
That will never pass away;
I will stand on every promise of your word.
For your covenant is sure,
And on this I am secure:
I can stand on every promise of your word.</p> <p>2) When I stumble and I sin,
Condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
You are faithful to forgive,
That in freedom I might live,
So I stand on every promise of your word.
Guilt to innocence restored;
You remember sins no more.
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.</p> | <p>3) When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
And I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
You will guide me with your hand
As I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
Every work begun in me,
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.</p> <p>4) Hope that lifts me from despair;
Love that casts out every fear
As I stand on every promise of your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,
For the Comforter has come,
And I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
Grace for all who will believe.
We will stand on every promise of your word.</p> |
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Prayers of Intercession

The road is long with many a winding turn that leads us to who knows where...

Loving Father, many of your children are travelling a road of uncertainty – a road with pitfalls and potholes; twists and turns; diversions which can have us going round in circles; a road where directions and guidance can be unclear or unhelpful. We think particularly of refugees, travelling an unknown path. You know their plight and watch over their every step. Bless them this day and the aid agencies and support groups who work to make their path smoother and straighter.

Lord of all, we pray for those who guide, teach and lead your people - ministers, local preachers, worship leaders, stewards, teachers. Send your spirit upon them that they may be renewed in their work of serving you and filled with joy and enthusiasm to share the good news of the gospel. And we remember all those in positions of authority throughout the world. Guide the thoughts of all decision makers that your will may be done and your kingdom come.

So, on we go. His welfare is my concern; no burden is he to bear; we'll get there...

Caring shepherd, you tell us, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest". We pray for all those who are weighed down with worry, illness, grief, loneliness, insecurity. We especially remember those listed today in our prayer book:

Bless all who work to improve the health and wellbeing of your flock. Give them patience, love and strength to share the load, and bless the weary and heavy laden with your comfort and peace, that they may have the faith to hand their troubles over to you.

He ain't heavy... He's my brother...

Abba; Father; we are all your children, with brothers and sisters near and far. We pray for the world-wide church and all its members joining their voices with ours in prayer and praise this day. Unite us in your love, join us by your spirit and bless us all with your grace and mercy.

We pray too for our brothers and sisters who have yet to hear the good news of the gospel. May we go where you lead us and speak that which you prompt us to say, so that your love may be shared and more people come to know you as their Lord and saviour.

And we remember our brothers and sisters living this day in fear; those who are persecuted for their faith; those living in countries torn apart by war; and those struggling to survive in places where there is famine and disease. Teach your children how to live in peace and live generously.

If I'm laden at all, I'm laden with sadness; that everyone's heart isn't filled with the gladness of love for one another...

In faith we bring our prayers to you Lord God, knowing that you hear us and walk with us day by day.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, 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 from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 503 – Love Divine

- 1) Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.
- 2) Come, almighty to deliver,
Let us all thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve thee as thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
Glory in thy perfect love.
- 3) Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in thee:
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley

Blessing

May the companionship of Christ encourage you.
May the self-giving of Christ nourish you.
And may the joy of the resurrection
astound you and propel you into sharing with others
the good news of the gospel. **Amen.**

Church of Scotland

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all,
now and evermore. **Amen.**