

## Sermon for Sunday 19 April 2026 – The Third Sunday of Easter

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*Acts 2.14a, 36-41; Psalm 116.1-3, 10-17; 1 Peter 1.17-23; Luke 24.13-35*

Heavenly Father, may my words honour you and be helpful to us. Amen. Good morning.

Today's New Testament passage begins with two of Jesus's followers walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It's a journey of about seven miles. One of them is Cleopas, the brother of Joseph, so Jesus's uncle. We're not told who the other person was. What we do know is that they are sad and confused. They had just seen Jesus, the one in whom they had placed so much hope, die on a cross. As they walk, discussing the events of the last few days, a man joins them. And listens how they tell him of a prophet, Jesus, who had been crucified and how three days later some women had found his tomb, empty.

I'd like this morning to look at how Jesus interacts with Cleopas and his friend and to see what lessons we might learn. Jesus begins by listening. Although Jesus clearly knows the events of his crucifixion and resurrection better than they do, he doesn't interrupt or correct them. He listens and lets them talk. By listening, Jesus hears about his death from an entirely different perspective. Not as the one who suffered, but from the point of view of those who looked on, those who had put their trust in him, those who were disappointed, those who were left asking the question, 'Well, what now?'

It's said that the difference between hearing and listening is paying attention. Unfortunately, many people listen not to understand, but to reply. How often do we find ourselves in conversations when we're trying to respond before the other person's finished speaking? I'm all too guilty of this. Even now, in my mind, I can hear Pippa saying, 'Let me finish!' Mea culpa.

It's so important when listening not to jump in with our own story, implying as we do that what we have to say is either more interesting or more relevant. Important not to cut people short, simply to show how much more we know than they do. Important to resist the temptation to make the experience of others simply another opportunity for us to become the centre of attention. If we want to understand someone, to help someone, listening and paying attention is a good place to start.

The good news for us is that Jesus is still listening. This morning, let us know and rejoice that Jesus both listens and pays attention when we speak to him, when we pray to him, when we simply ask him to hear us. Verses 1 and 2 of this morning's Psalm read as follows: 'I love the

Lord because he has heard my voice and my supplication, because he has inclined his ear to me. Therefore I will call upon him as long as I live.' Let us also be comforted by the fact that Jesus not only listens, but he promises to be with us always. Sadly, like Cleopas and his friend, we sometimes fail to recognise that God is walking with us.

In our study group on Wednesday, we were reminded of the famous poem Footprints in the Sand, and I quote it in part: 'So I said, you promised me, Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during my most trying periods of my life, there have been only one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?' The Lord replied, 'The times when you have seen only one set of footprints are the times when I carried you.' As God listens to us, let us listen to one another. As he is present for us, as we are able, let us be present for one another.

Continuing our narrative, we are told that Cleopas and his friend near their home, and as that happens, Jesus makes to carry on walking. Despite the family relationship, Cleopas still doesn't recognise that the person they've been walking with is Jesus. However, as it's almost evening, they urge their fellow traveller to come and eat with them.

This invitation, asking Jesus to join them, proves to be a turning point in their lives. As they sit down to eat, Jesus takes bread, blesses and breaks it, and gives it to them. And in doing so, Jesus re-enacts his words and actions at the Last Supper. As soon as Jesus does this, their eyes are opened and they recognise who he is. Everything now falls into place. 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?' Now, for the first time, they know and understand that Jesus is indeed alive!

We are not told what Jesus did next. However, we do know what Cleopas and his friend did. They were so excited they got up and immediately walked a further seven miles through the evening gloom back to Jerusalem, keen to tell the other disciples all that they had seen and heard and to add their witness to the fact that Jesus is alive.

So what do we learn from all this? Firstly, that God walks with us. I hope that when we leave church this morning, we will take with us the knowledge that God listens to us and is with us as we experience times of joy, times of sadness and struggle, And perhaps equally importantly, he is there with us in all the spaces in between, in the everyday ordinariness of life.

But my abiding thought, and the thought I leave with you, is this: Cleopas and his friend could have let Jesus carry on walking. Happily, they invited him to join them, and as a result, their lives were changed.

Jesus is portrayed in the famous painting by Holman Hunt as the light of the world knocking on a door that can only be opened from the inside. The painting takes its inspiration from the words found in Revelation chapter 3: 'Listen, I stand at the door knocking. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into you and eat with you, and you with me.' So when you hear God knocking, whether for the first time or maybe the umpteenth time, please open the door. Amen.