

Sermon 26th April 2020

provided by The Reverend Michael Cluett

One of the things I have been doing during this time of lockdown is to go for a long walk first thing in the morning. Walking along the river to Breinton there are very few people about, by the time I'm making the return journey, then you start to meet the joggers and dog walkers. Most will say a quick hello in passing, which is good, living on my own I miss the social contact. I look forward to this morning exercise, of course it has been helped by the glorious spring weather. The sunrise over the river, the birds singing, the skylarks are a real joy; the highlight was hearing the cuckoo on Easter morning. The trees coming into leaf, the spring flowers, now we have the banks of bluebells - all this lifts the spirit, it's easy to praise the Lord for the beauty of creation. It makes me grateful for the privileged life that I have. I ask myself what can I do to help those who are struggling during this pandemic. We can't all do what Major Captain Tom Moore did, raising over £23 million for NHS charities by making a hundred laps of his garden to celebrate his 100th. Birthday. That was a one off. And we haven't all got a voice like Andrea Bocelli who stood on the steps of Milan cathedral and sang Amazing Grace.

'Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come.
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

Each of us can do something, though, it is for each of us to find what it is. Being a good neighbour has been one thing that has come to the fore. Where I live we have set up a 'whats app' group, if one person is going to the supermarket they will get things for the rest of us. It has brought us together even though we don't have one to one contact. We are keeping an eye on each other, we have become much better neighbours.

So my morning walk has been a real help. There is a point on the return journey where you can see the skyline of Hereford in front of you, the spire of All Saints standing above the rest of the city. This always cheers me as I know I'm on the homeward leg - all's well. One of these days we will be back in our churches, together again, singing our praises to God for all that he has given us. Some might argue that in the midst of such a catastrophe, how can you be so cheerful. As Christians we live in the light of the resurrection. However bad things may be, there is always hope there is always love.

Walking each day cheers me up, it gives me a bit of freedom. It was a somewhat different walk that those two disciples were making on that first Easter day. Yes, they were returning home, but they seemed not to be convinced by reports that Jesus was alive. As they travel along the road a fellow traveller draws alongside and asks them what they are discussing. 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem

who doesn't know what has happened?' They tell him about Jesus and how there have been reports that he has been seen, how some of his women followers had been to his tomb early in the morning, found it empty, and a vision of angels told them that he was alive. You get the feeling that they are not convinced by this, but their walking companion challenges them. He goes through the scriptures pointing out those passages that tell of what must happen to the Messiah. They draw near to the village, Jesus begins to take his leave of them, evening is drawing on and the two disciples urge him to come in and stay. And it is when Jesus took the bread, blessed it and broke it that their eyes were opened. They recognise him, but he had disappeared. 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us.'

Straightway they return to Jerusalem, they find the eleven and their companions gathered together. They are told yes it is true, Simon has seen him, and then they tell their news.

Walks can be taken for all sorts of reasons, for me, at the moment it is both physical and mental. For those two disciples it was a chance to reflect on their life with Jesus. Not all of us have the opportunity to get out and enjoy the countryside, for whatever reason we are shut in for much of each day. The poet Malcolm Guite wrote recently of receiving a message from a woman in Wuhan, who had found his poem on Julian of Norwich helpful, perhaps it will be for you as well. (I ought to explain, for those of you who don't know much about Julian, that she was an anchoress, walled into a room on the side of Saint Julian church, you can still go and visit it. She chose isolation to get closer to God, but would also sit at her window offering spiritual advice to those who came and sought her out. She lived in 14th - 15th. Centuries).

Show me, O anchoress, your anchor-hold
Deep in the love of God, and hold me fast,
Show me again in whose hands we are held,
Speak to me from your window in the past.
Tell me again the tale of Love's compassion
For all of us who fall in the mire,
How he is wounded with us, how his passion
Quickens the love that haunted our desire
Show me again the wonder of at-one-ment
Of Christ- in-us distinct and yet the same,
Who makes, and loves, and keeps us in each moment,
And looks on us with pity not with blame.
Keep telling me, for all my faith may waver.
Love is his meaning, only love, forever.