



Open hearts, active hearts
Reverend Judith Wigglesworth
Easter 3, 30 April 2017
Acts 2:14a, 36-41
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35

May my spoken words illuminate the written word and lead us to the living Word. Amen.

Walking is something I've been trying to do more of – and with my trusty FitBit my target at the moment is 10,000 steps each day. For those of you who have a well established routine of walking or exercising around the bays, that is probably not much in your scheme of things! For those of you who might struggle like me to keep up the exercise, 10,000 steps might sound a lot. For me to get there, I need two intentional walks per day. Sometimes that happens – especially when I tackle Mt Kaukau near – other days I simply don't get there, especially when it gets dark earlier and.... oh dear – it's too late now!

I've been pondering the theme of walking since Holy Week – putting together our Good Friday pilgrimage packs, and then going on my own pilgrimage that day, along the beach and back again. This theme is with us today too, as we read the beautiful Gospel reading of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, when Jesus steps in beside them.

I never fail to be moved by this story. It's a story of an encounter with God - and encounter with the risen Christ. And it's a story of humanity's quest for God. We seek God in our midst and then when God does show up, we don't always notice.

Today I'd like to draw on some words Reverend Ellie wrote for our second parish consultation workshop recently. How do we notice God? How do we listen to, and know, what the Lord is saying to us?

First, let's try and enter the world of our readings.

All the readings today refer to the heart. “Today’s texts are not for the fainthearted: they are about pounding hearts, wounded hearts, and burning hearts. And they invite us to encounter the living Christ in the heart of who we are.”¹

In our reading from Acts, the people in the crowd Peter was addressing were “cut to the heart”. In a moment of sharp self-realisation that penetrated to the very core of their being, they realised Peter’s words were a call to action. He urged them to repent and be baptised – and 3,000 responded that very day.

In his epistle, Peter is writing to a community of Christian converts who have become marginalised and abused. They’re in a critical situation and need a reminder of the freedom and grace they have been given through the resurrection of Jesus. They need encouragement to take the gift of love, given to them by God, into their relationships with one another. So Peter says: “love one another wholeheartedly with all your strength. You have been born again... through the living and enduring word of God.”

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus also needed encouragement. Their hearts were in turmoil – it was the third day after Jesus’ crucifixion. Rumours were rife – some women had found the tomb empty that morning and seen some angels who said Jesus was alive....

The two disciples were talking about all this, just as so many would have been all that day as the news spread. Maybe they were arguing about the details, who said what, who saw what. How would they have felt? Confused? Worried? Sceptical? Hopeful? I wonder if deep within them was a yearning for God to be alive and present. So they share all this with the man who comes near and falls into step beside them. They invite the man to eat with them....and it’s not till he takes bread, blesses and breaks it, that their eyes are opened and they recognise him as Jesus. Then he vanishes.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing – after Jesus is gone these two disciples suddenly realise that their hearts has been burning within them as Jesus had talked with them on the road. They had been talking with God in the form of the risen Christ, but didn’t know it.

I wonder if there are times when we encounter God but don’t know it? When God meets us where we are and we don’t realise it; when God speaks to us through others and we don’t notice it; when God breaks through our masks and barriers and in the most

¹ Susan Andrews, Christian Century www.christiancentury.org 7 April 1999

unexpected of times is present in ways we can't quite explain. I know there have been times in my life when I have discerned the movement of God's Spirit just when I most craved new understanding, or peace, or courage.

So how do we hear the voice of God?

Ellie suggested that the best way to discern the voice of God, is to know the character of God. The more we spend time learning and being with God, the more we can recognise when God is speaking into our lives. She shared four insights:

1 *It is easier to hear from Jesus when you are following Jesus and walking closely where Jesus walks*

A lot of Jesus' teaching with his disciples happened on the road together, living out the kingdom of God, not just talking about it. Jesus didn't take his disciples off to a lonely place and explain the kingdom to them from scripture for three years. Jesus lived the kingdom life and taught the disciples about this in very practical, getting hands dirty kind of ways. The same applies to us. We are called to spend time with whoever is on our heart; to get out and about and walk and pray; and to get our hands dirty in community life.

2 *It is easier to hear if we are regularly praying and putting ourselves in a position where we could hear if God chose to speak*

Our worlds are very noisy. It is hard to hear if there is no space for a new sound to be played. If we have regular morning and evening times where we come and sit at Jesus' feet, bringing him our hopes and fears, then we are more likely to hear Jesus speaking into our hearts than if we do not regularly do so.

Those whose lives are shaped by deep patterns of prayer are often the humblest in speaking about what they feel Jesus is saying. As we lean into God we come to think more of God and less of ourselves, and therefore have a more patient and gentle conviction of God's call when it is discerned.

3 *We can and should expect generous prophetic blessings from the Holy Spirit*

The gifts of prophecy are clearly given to the Body of Christ to support and encourage us in our life and ministry. Prophecy can come in the form of words or pictures or dreams. Because the gift of prophecy is given for the building up of the Body of Christ, it operates safely in cultures of shared discernment and accountability.

The prophetic operates in three phases: revelation, interpretation and application. Those phases involve the whole of the body of Christ and we submit to each other in that process. If you feel as though you have received a revelation, then it is appropriate to come and share that with our church elders who will then guide the interpretation and application.

4 *When we ask a new question of discernment, we do so standing on the gifts and wisdom of our past*

In our Anglican tradition, we speak of having four legs or pillars in balance to hold us: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. New revelations, insights, and calls from God can be tested and affirmed by the resonance that they have with those four pillars. God is always re-creating the world, but God is always God and we have a solid base in which we collectively perceive the character of God and therefore the voice of God's creative life-giving Spirit.

Those four insights about how we hear the voice of God can all challenge us in seasons of change, and in this season of change in our parish.

Are we open to being "cut to the heart" and called to action when we hear the Gospel of love, like the crowds listening to Peter?

Are we willing to love one another wholeheartedly with all our strength, just like the Christian converts that Peter wrote to?

Are we alert to moments when our hearts burn within us with a passion and a fire, alerting us to the movement of God's Spirit, just like the hearts of the two disciples did on the road to Emmaus?

And what's in our hearts? Are our hearts consumed with worry and fear about what's happening next? About how on earth we'll manage to keep walking our kingdom path when so many familiar stepping stones are not there any more?

Or are our hearts open to discerning God's voice? Are our hearts confident that we will never have to walk the path to Emmaus on our own? Do we believe with all our hearts that when bread is blessed, broken and shared, it's not just a remembrance of what Jesus did, but a symbol of the living Christ among us?

Let us go and break bread for others – to open their hearts to the living Christ.

Let our hearts be open and active to God in our midst.

Amen.