

'Lord, reveal yourself to us'

St Peter's Barrowden, Rutland, Sunday 30th April, 2017

3rd Sunday of Easter, Yr A

Sermon by the Rev'd Dr Mike Kirby, Priest-Vicar (SSM), Chester Cathedral

1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Amen

Lord, reveal yourself to us; reveal yourself to us. It is an absolute pleasure and delight to be invited here by Chris to be with you this morning – that we all will experience the revelation of Jesus Christ in the sharing of bread and wine at this holy communion, and to be back with my dear friends Chris and Gerry – and make some new ones amongst you I am sure. Chris was my training incumbent up at Blackburn Cathedral for three years – three hard, difficult, trying years they were.....for Chris that is, putting up with me! It was a complete honour for me to be there and learn so much from him and the people of Blackburn; training for the church, yes; but also how God and the living Lord Jesus Christ reveals themselves to us on a daily basis in the world around us – if we have the right lenses on with which to see.

As Chris might have mentioned, my life has been one of science – the use of Physics in Medicine....the medicine of the treatment of cancer with radiation, in particular. Today's gospel is one of my favourites, in that it has such resonance with the art of science. That old adage that good scientific research (in fact research of any kind) is 95% perspiration and 5% inspiration is absolutely true. And we see it

here, in this beautiful story in Luke of the road to Emmaus.....a road of discovery that we are all on in some way; and within our lives, the living Lord Jesus is revealed to us, perhaps many many times throughout our journeys.

For here we are, on the seven mile journey of the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus....by foot, so it will have taken a few hours at least. Luke, as always, uses a beautiful narrative style to relate the story in his own distinctive way – perhaps as always reflecting both ours and his concern for the message of Christ in the layers beneath the pure recall itself. It is a story which leads up to the witnessing of the ascension of Jesus into heaven, which primarily appears in Luke’s gospel alone, although some manuscripts also have it as the last few verses of Mark’s. The ascension of Jesus’ physical body up into heaven is the pinnacle of the resurrection events, of which the road to Emmaus is one – events used perhaps to teach once more, as Jesus’ early ministry in Galilee – but also to convince; convince the disciples of the fulfilling of the scriptures, to open up truly their hearts and minds to the revelation of the resurrection of Jesus, and the gift of eternal life Jesus brings.....to all of us, even now. Alleluia!

The two disciples are not named; they are relatively unknown – they could be you and I walking through the village here, or in the towns around where we live. The revealing of Jesus’ true identity takes some time – whether it was deliberately hid from their eyes over those hours or it took time and discipline, a period allowing the disciples to proclaim themselves the news of Jesus to this ‘stranger’ on their own, before their eyes can see what is revealed in front of them; with another opportunity to learn about the full meaning of

Jesus, fulfilling the law and the prophets – from the Son of Man himself.

As I mentioned earlier, this resonates so much with the scientific life; where much work needs to be done, much hard graft over days, months, even years coupled with perhaps a few moments of inspiration, for scientific discoveries to be revealed. Within the history of science, the big ‘reveals’ and the great Nobel prize winning scientists are well known to us. In my own field of radiation therapy, people like Pierre and Marie Curie in the discovery of radioactivity, Roentgen in the production of X-rays; Niels Bohr in the modern starting model of the atom, which allows us to understand in a relatively simple way how x-ray interact with matter; Harold Gray who defined formally the unit of radiation dose, which is named in his honour; the great ideas of Sir Godfrey Hounsfield and Sir Peter Mansfield for medical imaging using x-ray computed tomography and magnetic resonance which have completely transformed our world of medicine and the treatment of cancer using x-rays.

All of these examples have had points of revelation – where the ideas come for developing technology, or there is a great discovery of a scientific phenomenon. These happen in big and small ways, every day in the world of science – and I have been fortunate enough to have a few of my own in some small way. One delightfully revealed to me a few years after leaving Manchester University, where I undertook my doctorate, when in a seminar at the university, one of the then students told me in conversation excitedly that he was about to use Kirby’s methods for examining biological tissue in situ using x-ray diffraction. I must admit I did a bit of a

double take and asked him more about those methods – before revealing the fact that I was the Kirby he was talking about. An even more delightful conversation ensued after that!

Like Jesus, revealing the answers to the disciples about the reasoning behind the events of his death and resurrection, science can bring us answers about our universe. But, as I mention to school and college students, and my own in Liverpool; science and faith for me, and many scientists, are complementary pursuits – both are needed to understand more fully God's created order, as the famous Professor Brian Cox has said himself; a quote I often use. That both 'believing and non-believing scientists should acknowledge each other's contribution to human beings' search for meaning and to avoid the 'toxic' dismissals of different worldviews'. They complement each other, in my opinion; a term which was first proposed by a Physicist, Niels Bohr, to describe the weird and whacky world of fundamental particles.

We hear in the Emmaus story too of how the hearts of the two disciples burnt within them, when Jesus was talking. That feeling is one that all scientists look for, the feeling when that brilliant idea comes, or the data reveals something new and as yet undiscovered. It is how I describe that one feels when finding our true vocations – when we find our real niche in life, for the things we want and love doing; vocations being in all our lives, not just in a sacred calling. It is an aspect which Prof Rowan Williams, previous Archbishop of Canterbury and now master at Magdalene College Cambridge once described so eloquently as 'the call by God to individuals to be distinctively themselves....strange and true'. The disciples then had

their own vocations perhaps revealed by Jesus, in the most amazing way possible. It is something which can and do experience even today, especially within our Christian lives.

The action of the road to Emmaus, as indeed scientific research and development does, roots us in work which is at the heart of our everyday lives; finding out more and more about the wonders of God's creation and using that knowledge for the good of others. But Emmaus brings us something extra too – which roots us in our Christian lives as community. In the breaking of bread and the sharing of fellowship around the table, Jesus brought to them, as he will bring to us in a few moments, the joys of ultimate sharing, ultimate revelation – in the sharing of bread and wine, in communion with Christ, as his own body blood....as he asked us to do from that very first thanksgiving meal, the Eucharist. It is action and sacrament which roots us, binds us, nourishes and inspires us in our lives through the holy spirit, to go on to do greater and greater things.

For me, it is the greatest part in my scientific life, being the solid foundation for my life as a scientist and as a Christian. Helping me to trust in God and open my eyes wider to see how the living Lord Jesus is there in the moments of reveal, yes; but also always there, revealing himself and the acts of God's spirit to us time and time and time again.....but we need to have our eyes open in order to see it. It is one of the imperishable seeds mentioned in Peter's letter; as part of the living and enduring word of God; and should be a constant prayer for us. That the living Lord Jesus reveals himself more and more to us in our daily lives; but also that our eyes, like those of the

disciples on the road to Emmaus, keep on looking for those moments
– and we tell others of what we have seen and heard; in Jesus' name.

Amen.