

EASTER 2019
LUKE 24:1-27

Good News – for sharing: Luke 24:1-12

Tell me something good that has happened this week?

What did you do when this good thing happened? Did you tell someone? How did they react?

Did you share your joy?

Here's what might have happened: you used old technology and called someone on the phone to tell them your good news; but nobody answered the phone – how does that feel? It's a bit disappointing!

Or you sent someone a text – “You'll never believe what happened to me?” You want them to reply so that you can send another text telling them your good news; but they don't reply; their phone must be switched off, or they've not seen the message, and so you can't reply. How does that feel? You're a bit frustrated?

Or you get to tell them your good news; they reply “you're having a laugh!” They clearly don't believe you! How does that feel? You have this good news, but your friends don't believe you; they think you're making it up?

Here's some good news: the minister gave us a chocolate easter egg!

What is the good news of Easter? “Jesus is raised from the dead!” *“He is not here; He has risen!”* This is glorious, the great good news for His friends: they had watched Him die on Friday afternoon and now some of the women went to the place where they had put His body, because they wanted to put some oils and perfumes on His body, to finish the funeral. But when they got there, they couldn't really understand what they saw. The stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty; as if that is not enough, there are two angels there to tell them what has happened. *“He is not here; He has risen.”* God has raised Jesus from dead.

What are they to do? They went back to the others and told them the good news; Jesus is alive. They must have been bursting to tell the others what they had seen and heard. They ran all the way back to the house? Two things went wrong:

1. Jesus' friends didn't believe them! It is not really surprising! This had never happened before; it has not happened since that someone who has died has come back to life again; they watched Him die and were sad, so this was going to turn everything upside down again! The others didn't believe them!
2. Peter went to see. He ran to the tomb to see what had happened and he saw the tomb was empty and he saw the strips of cloth that had wrapped Jesus' body. But the story tells us that he went away wondering to himself what had happened; he didn't tell anyone at this stage!

Later, Peter would spend the rest of his life telling people this good news story; some didn't believe, but many people did and we wouldn't know it today without people like these women and Peter telling us what they saw; the good news at Easter – Jesus is alive!

#Jesusiswithuseverywherewego: Luke 24:13-27

Here is a map of this area of the city – there are some yellow dots marking places on the map. Where are you going this week? Is there some place where you are going to spend lots of your time this week?

How easy is it to remember that Jesus is with you there?

How easy is it there to share Jesus' love with other people you meet there? How easy is it to tell them about Jesus' love and your faith?

#Jesusiswithuseverywherewego – have you worked out the hashtag yet?

Two people are walking home at the end of Easter Sunday; they are sad, disappointed, not wanting to talk perhaps and walking in silence as they trudge home. They had expected so much of Jesus, but now He is dead and they are not sure that they believe the rumours of his being raised. They are walking the seven miles back to their home village of Emmaus from Jerusalem.

The stranger falls in beside them as they walk; they don't know who He is; maybe it is dark, there are no street lights; maybe He's wearing a hoodie that covers His head; they don't know who this stranger is and He starts to ask them what's bothering them. They're surprised that He doesn't know about these events and they begin to tell the stranger all about Jesus and how they had hoped but now they are disappointed. Jesus begins to tell them all about Himself from the Bible and what God has done and how this is all part of His plan to save the world! Jesus is there all the time and they didn't see.

But their hearts are buzzing with Jesus' talk. They wanted Him to stop with them and share some food before carrying on with His journey and when He started to share their food they recognised Him. Was it something He said? Was it something they saw, the nail marks? Was it the way He broke the bread? Whatever it was they recognised Him and He disappeared. They ran the seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell the others; He had appeared to them too!

This is the great idea in the story: Jesus is with us everywhere we go. He was with these two people on the road back to Emmaus, when they were feeling hopeless and disappointed. He is with us in the places on our map, the places we will go this week. He is with us in the ways we feel, the times when we're excited, or disappointed, or afraid – Jesus is with us in all of these! Because He lives, He is with us everywhere we go; He is with us to help us, to forgive us, to guide us, to strengthen us, to love us.

Love without limits: 1 John 4:7-12

Who loves you unconditionally? Who loves you and it doesn't matter what you say, or what you do? Who loves you and it doesn't matter the colour of your hair, or your size or shape? Who loves you and it doesn't matter that you don't always love them? Who loves you even when life is hard and others have left you alone to struggle on? Who loves you and accepts you as you are, spots, stammer, failed exams? This is love without limits, unconditional love. Do you know what it feels like to be loved like that?

Or do people tell you that they love you, but only if you behave well, or only if you pass your exams, or only if you do things in the way they want you to do them, or only if you dress in the way they want you to dress, or only if you conform to their rules, or only if you love them first and better? That is love with limits, love with conditions!

"This is love..." (1 John 4:10) This is almost a definition of love; here is the kind of love that God has for us and for world, unconditional love, love without limits. There are two things to see about this love: Firstly, God loves us first, before we loved Him (or not); God's love for us is not because we have decided to trust Him; God's love for us comes first; He has loved us before we could love Him and before we decided to follow Jesus. Secondly, God's love for us is shown in Jesus and not just in His good life, but especially in His cross and in His death; this is the full extent of God's love for us; this is the kind of love that God has for us, the love that is willing to make sacrifices on our behalf, the love that is willing to die for us. This is what unconditional love is like; this is love without limits; this is God's unconditional love for us. God loves us – full stop. He doesn't love us *if* we're good, or if we do the right things, or if we love Him back, or if we dress in the right clothes, or if we pass our exams. God loves us as we are.

What do you see in the glossy magazines? We see pictures of people who feel the need to look perfect; people won't love them if they have spots on their faces! "People only love you when you're winning" sings Fleetwood Mac. "I'm afraid that I'll let my parents down and they

won't love me as much because I've failed at my exams." "I'll only be loved in Church when I conform to other people's rules and expectations." "I can't truly be myself anywhere!" This is our world! Who loves you unconditionally? Who loves you without limits?

Easter tells us that God loves us unconditionally. Easter tells us that God loves us without limits. God loves us first, before we can love Him, before we've decided to love Him; He has loved us first. We know that He loves us in this way because Jesus has died and is raised. The cross is the place where Jesus has sacrificed Himself for the people He loves, for us, for our world. There is no greater love than this; there is no deeper love than this. This is how we are loved by God, unconditionally, without limits; how good is that! But the challenge of being loved like this by God is that we learn to love one another and other people in this same way! Unconditional love is hard to do, but that is what we are called to do. Why? Because that's what God has done for us! The good news is that God helps us to love others like this; He forgives us when we get it wrong. The bad news is, the challenge never goes away!