

LUKE 24:13-35  
I SEE WHO WALKS WITH ME!

Walking or “going for a walk”; there is a difference. We go for a walk when we don’t know what to do next, or want time to think, or need time to get some fresh air; we walk to get somewhere or even to get lost, to get some exercise, or to exercise the children or the dog and get rid of excess energy. There are all sorts of reasons to go for a walk! Who would be your ideal walking companion? Your spouse: there was a time when “walking out” was the way in which that courtship ritual was described, although now it means something quite different – “I’m leaving!” The dog – there is a great community of dog-walkers for whom it is a daily exercise and a chance to meet people in the same boat as you! Who would you walk with? Clare Balding has turned that question into a Radio 4 programme, walking with people to find out more about them because when you walk, you talk; there are no awkward silences when you’re walking, but it is also a chance to talk about things; people talk while they walk and often solve the problems of the world as they go. The Green Strollers, our walking group, walk together because enjoy the company as they walk together. Who would you walk with? You might hate walking, so your question is – who would be your best dinner guest, the person you’d most like to invite to dinner? The same conversation goes on while we eat as while we walk! The Church has a history of pilgrimage, walking in faith and for faith, walking to special places, so often done with other people.

Cleopas and perhaps his wife are walking home. They are doing the 7-mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus, going home after a difficult weekend in the city. If this was a cartoon, there would be a black cloud over their heads. They are gloomy, disappointed, sad; everything has gone wrong. “*We had hoped...*” (Luke 24:21) but you catch the despair in their voices; that hope is gone and they have heard stories of Jesus being alive but they’re not sure that they believe these stories. As they walk, Jesus joins them, but as we said they don’t recognise Him; only later, in the house, when He breaks that piece of bread, do they see who their walking companion was; Jesus is alive; “*We have seen Lord!*” “*The two...*” (Luke 24:35) “*Were not...*” (Luke 24:32) Something was going on in them as they walked and talked and listened and only afterwards did they get a sense of that conversation with Jesus; I wonder how much of it they remembered?

The walking picture is a fascinating picture for us of what it means to be people searching for faith, or of what it means to be disciples of Jesus, or of what it means to be Church. We are people who are travelling through the world, people with a purpose: the picture suggests that Jesus walks with us as we travel. “I see who travels with me” is the legend on the screen. It begs the question: do we see that Jesus travels with us? Do we realise that on every step of our travels, Jesus is there with us? Do we recognise that? He is unseen, yet there with us: people searching for faith, people trying to live by faith, a church trying to discover our way for the future – Jesus travels with us.

Our two friends are confused; they are trying to understand what has happened these last few days. They had hopes, but these hopes are dashed and disappointed; they had trusted Jesus but it seems as if that trust had been misplaced; they have seen the miracles, but Jesus was crucified in weakness and defeat and now where are they to turn? How many people have the same sense of being lost in our world today: their hopes are dashed for all sorts of reasons, the balloon of their dreams has been burst; life is much more fraught than they ever expected; they are disappointed, lost, and looking for something. “*Beginning...*” (Luke 24:27) The Bible shows us Jesus; Easter shows us Jesus alive; Emmaus suggests that Jesus walks with us through life even at the times when we feel at the end of our tether. He is able to help us, to

settle us, to give us life in a new way, to save us. Jesus walks with us when are confused and looking for faith.

Maybe we are trying to travel through life as disciples of Jesus. We believe and are trying to put that faith into practice, to live life by faith. We start off in the first flush of enthusiasm, as so often with something new, it is exciting and we walk with a brisk step and a strong pace. But then we begin to discover that faith is harder than we imagined; there are choices and dilemmas that we never expected, moral choices that other people don't face, but are caused by our faith-based values. Other people laugh at us for our faith or make life hard for us and there are lots of other obstacles and hurdles in the way, fences to negotiate, streams to cross, hills to climb and we wonder what to do next. Worst of all, there are times when we consider that we're doing this all on our own! But, Jesus travels with us on that faith-road; every step of the way, every question, every dilemma, every delight, He is with us; He walks with us; He is there and He knows us. Have we lost sight of that? Have the pressures of life taken away that assurance? Here it is: Jesus walks with us everywhere we go.

A Church travelling into the future? There is nothing automatic about that idea. That has to be our determination! Perhaps you are thinking that Church as it is will see you out and you have no concern for the future; I hope not. Perhaps your deep desire is for church to stand still and you wish you were at the back putting on the brakes so that nothing more will change and we'll still be comfortable. Maybe we are a Church that is confused about life and faith and things that go on in the world, because the world has changed since you were young and faith was a simpler thing back then and church life was simpler because everything was always the same. The church that is stuck in the time-warp of the 1950's, 70's, 90's or even 2000, and unwilling to journey on into the future – that church won't survive for long. We need to be the church that is looking to the future, to keep the best of our history and heritage and take that with us into the future and work out how we can best be church for our generation and for the next generation and for generations still to come.

Jesus walks with us into that future. That picture both comforts us and challenges us. Jesus walking with us comforts us because as church looking at the future we don't do that on our own and in own strength; Jesus walks with us. When there are things that disturb us, or disappoint us or leave us feeling lost, Jesus is with us to help us, to listen to our prayers, to understand our frustrations and to guide us. His presence with us is a comforting presence, reassuring us that we are not alone, speaking to us, breaking bread with us to remind us of His deep, lasting love for His Church. His presence with us is also challenging: Jesus expects us to be loyal to Him and expects us to find ways of engaging in the mission of God for our place and our time. The models of Church that we inherited from the 1950's don't work anymore and the challenge we have is to find ways of mission that are suitable for 2017 and beyond. Jesus challenges us to walk in His ways, to live with His values in our hearts and to be the kind of church He wants us to be. We all have opinions about Church and later in the year you will have the chance to express these opinions about shaping the future of the church; but one thing above all that needs to be in our hearts and in our prayers – what does Jesus want of us? He walks with us, challenging us to be best that we can be.

The Bible is huge part of Christian faith and the church's life: "*Beginning...*" (Luke 24:27) Read it, learn from it about Jesus, listen to the values He teaches, see Him live by faith and do the mission of God. Let it grip you; let it set your hearts and minds buzzing with grace. The sacrament of communion is a huge part of Christian faith and church life: "*the two...*" (Luke 24:35) We break bread together at Jesus' invitation; we share in His love and in the work He has done; we do that together and we express our love for one another. Jesus walks with us:

the Bible and the sacrament are among the ways in which we know that! The best walking companion for us, for the church? There is none better than Jesus. "I see who walks with me": do we see that Jesus walks with us? Do we listen for Him in reading the Bible? Do we find Him when we break bread together? Cleopas and his companion didn't see who walked with them at first, only later. Do we see that Jesus walks with us? He is there with us every step of the way!