

*Prayer: God of grace, you come to meet with us wherever we are and you speak to us through your Word. As we reflect on the Gospel reading today, may we hear your Spirit speaking to us, and may we be drawn deeper into the story of your unfolding love. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*

Reading: Luke 24:44-53

A well told story will find you breathless as you wait for the next instalment. It will create within you a sense of tension, questions about what will happen and imagining the different ways it could unfold. The very best stories take us a step further – they draw us in and invite us to be a part of the story being told.

Luke addressed his Gospel to a gentleman called Theophilus – a lover of God. In his opening remarks he states that he is trying to provide an orderly account of the things of Jesus Christ so that this lover of God who has heard all about Jesus can understand the significance of the things that happened in Jesus Christ. And our reading today comes at the other end of the book. Luke has been telling the story in such a way that he invites us to discover and engage with the person of Jesus. He wants us to gain a sense of the wonder of Christ, to journey with the disciples in joy, sorrows, misunderstandings, and insights. And our reading today comes as these disciples embark on the next phase of this journey of joy, sorrow, understanding, misunderstanding and love.

In the days before this reading, the disciples have experienced the confusion and disorientation of the Jesus being crucified. A few days later, it is reported that he is alive again and then two disciples meet Jesus on the road without being able to recognize him. Throughout the day, the unrecognized Christ teaches and opens the minds of the disciples to the teachings of Scripture. They found their hearts warmed and in hindsight realise that Jesus had been with them.

After this insight the two travels ran to join the rest of the disciples to tell them about their meeting with Jesus. Whilst they were talking, Jesus came to meet with them again. And he spoke. Jesus' words explained God's endless love for the world. He opened the Scriptures and showed them that he was the fulfilment of God's promises. He helped them understand the purposes of God in the world and he drew them into the story of the unfolding love of God.

And as Jesus ascends into heaven, Luke narrates the first steps of a new community. This community was made up of all sorts of people. Peter was brash, confident and yet fickle. John was thoughtful, and slower to act. Philip got excited when he met Jesus the first time and rushed off to tell his friends. James was called a son of thunder. Matthew was a tax collector who collaborated with the Roman authorities. And across from him was Simon the Zealot – who was a member of a political movement dedicated to radical and violent action to overthrow Roman power and all Jews who collaborated with them. This fledgling community, the first steps of the church are taken by a diverse group of people who were being drawn together into a wider story of God's endless love.

A diverse group of people step forth into a brave new world. These first disciples followed Jesus and saw him face to face, and then they participated in Jesus' ministry proclaiming the Gospel experiencing the same physical distance from Christ that all the Christians that follow have experienced. Jesus instructs them to go and tell the story of the grace of God. They are to proclaim the endless unfailing love of God that breaks the power of death itself and to do so through the power of the Spirit.

Luke writes his Gospel so that we can find ourselves caught up in the story. Just like the first disciples, we are a diverse group of people held together by the love of God. Just like those first disciples, we are learning to navigate a world in which we experience the love and joy of the Risen

Christ and yet is marked with trials and hardships. Just like those first disciples, we find ourselves learning and discovering more of the love of God. The disciples were sent to proclaim and share what they had been taught and what they had experienced of the love and power of God, and we are called into the same ministry.

We have experienced God in a diversity of ways! We experience God in the joys, the sorrows, the misunderstandings, and the insights! And we meet with God in the interruptions of life. The interruption caused by Covid-19 and the various responses have provided us with time to pause and to reflect. It is worth considering in what ways you have experienced the life changing work of God in this time. What have you learned through this experience at home? How has the Spirit been at work within you? What skills have you gained? What new insights have you gleaned? These reflections and these learnings of the mysteries of God's grace help give shape and content to our announcement of the Kingdom of God and the invitation to share in God's endless love. It means that as we establish new patterns of life to fit a changed world, we can speak from the experience of the presence of the Risen Christ in our midst.

*May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.*

*Grace & Peace,*

*Ed Masters*