

I find the story of Jesus meeting and talking to the two travellers on the road to Emmaus one of the most exciting in the Bible. Would you like to know why?

Well there are some obvious aspects to what make this a great story:

- It is a resurrection story – and all the resurrection stories in the gospels are wonderful, imbued with radical surprise.
- It is a story where Jesus is talking, quite casually, with people he is travelling with, and I like this image of prayer – that whatever is happening, wherever we are going, God opens up the option for intimate conversation with him through the Spirit.
- I love the image of Holy Communion that comes through in this story too – they don't recognise Jesus until the breaking of bread – and at the moment they experience him as he really is – as their friend, their Saviour, their God.

But there is one image in this story that excites me more than all of these. You see when Jesus meets these people on the road, they are walking in the wrong direction. They have left Jerusalem, the Holy City, the city of the prophets and they are leaving behind their hopes and dreams there, convinced that their trust in Jesus was all a mistake.

They are walking in the wrong direction – and when Jesus catches up with them, he doesn't immediately turn them round and march them back to the city – he walks in the wrong direction with them. It is only much later, after a long walk and many conversations and a meal shared, that they recognise the truth and rush back to Jerusalem of their own accord.

I wonder how your faith has been affected by the pandemic and the surreal situation we find ourselves in? I'm sure, for many (for most) it has been a hard road to travel, and of course, we have a long time – an unknown time – to walk in this way. For those who have lost friends and family, or who are worrying about them on a daily basis, we may find ourselves walking away from God for a while, consumed by grief and worry.

For others, this change of pace, change of routine, may have offered an opportunity to reconnect with our God. We may have realised that we were accidentally drifting away from him and now that the busyness of our lives is calmed, we have rediscovered our faith in new and surprising ways.

My point is this: there is no right or wrong way to cope in the present circumstances. We are all in slightly different places – our experiences of the same event is going to be very varied. Our worries, our priorities, our loneliness, our business, our sense of place and peace and family – these are different for us all. We are not always going to feel that we are all walking in the same direction, despite the fact that we are superficially all in the same position. And my point is this. Whichever direction you are walking in, God walks with you.

If you are full of resurrection joy and are happy and loving your garden and your life, God walks with you.

If you are consumed by worry, anxiety or fear, God walks with you.

If you are grieving, God walks with you.

If you are trying really really hard to do the right thing and be the right person in difficult circumstances but are unsure how long you can keep it up, God walks with you.

If you have given up, are angry with God or fear he has left you, God walks with you in that direction too.

And so the story of the road to Emmaus reminds us of the truth of those words spoken by Peter in our reading from Acts, “this promise is for you, and your children, and for those who are far away, and for everyone”. Jesus’ resurrection is a promise to each one of us that regardless of how we are feeling, regardless of how we are coping, he walks by our side. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is ours through Jesus, now and always, Amen.