

I learned a new word this week. It's a noun. Coronacoaster. Coronacoaster is a word used to describe the emotional ups and downs of the pandemic. You'll no doubt know something about this word. You may know the feeling of one day waking up extremely happy. The quiet of lockdown, bringing joy, baking banana bread, going on a long solitary walk. And the very next day, waking up miserable, putting gin on your corn flakes, missing people you don't even like. That's the coronacoaster of this pandemic.

And as I read the resurrection stories again this year, I've noticed that the disciples were on their own version of a coronacoaster that first Easter; those emotions are all over the place. The last couple of weeks, when I've preached, the dominant emotion in the stories has been one of fear. The disciples being startled and terrified by the risen Lord Jesus.

But there's no fear in this story that we've heard today. The story of Jesus walking with two of his followers on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. There's no fear, only joy and celebration in this story. That first Easter prompts in the disciples, the whole range of emotions that we are feeling particularly intensely in this time of pandemic. And there's a deeper connection between our experience and the experience of the disciples that first Easter.

St. Paul writes about it in his letter to the Romans where he says this, "If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies, through the spirit who dwells in you." That's a deep and dense verse. I think it actually, it bears repeating. "If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through the spirit who dwells in you."

When we read the stories of the resurrection as we do in this season, we're reading about our own experience. The resurrection of Jesus is the first fruits of the hope that is set before us and all believers. Jesus' resurrection opens up a new quality of life: a resurrection life that extends beyond the grave. And I want to expand on this by saying something this morning about the journey that Jesus makes with his followers on this road to Emmaus, because I think it speaks of our experience, particularly three aspects of our own spiritual journey, as we journey in this new resurrection life that Jesus has won for us.

The first thing to note is that we make our spiritual journey in company with Jesus. We're told in the story that these two men were walking to Emmaus when Jesus himself came up and walked alongside them. Jesus himself came

near, the text says. In the Christian journey that we're on, we don't journey to God. We don't see God as the prize waiting at the end of our spiritual journey. We don't journey to God. We journey with God. This is the message, particularly, of the Festival of Pentecost, which comes 40 days after Easter day. So, we'll celebrate that great festival soon.

And what we celebrate on that day is the coming of God's Holy Spirit. Jesus promised his disciples that after he'd gone, he'd returned to them by his spirit. And that was the promise that was fulfilled at the first feast of Pentecost. On that day, as the spirit was poured out amongst the disciples, the God who was made known in Jesus, came and dwelt with his people by his spirit. In the words that we've heard from Saint Paul, "The spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in you. Dwells in each one of us."

One of the words you use to describe the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is Paraclete, and that's a Greek word, not a religious word. It's a secular word for a tug, a little boat, that pulls alongside a larger boat and guides that boat into the harbor. And you'll see that the reason why that's a good word to use, because that drawing alongside is the work of the spirit. It's what Jesus does with his disciples on the road to Emmaus. He draws alongside those two men. We don't journey alone. We don't journey to God. We journey with God.

And the flip side of this great truth is that we need to be attentive to the presence of God's spirit, the spirit of Jesus in our lives. We certainly need to be more attentive to the two people in this story, who knows how long they'd been walking with the risen Jesus before they noticed who they were with? There's an organization called the Cycling Awareness Trust, which made a great ad in England just before I left. It featured two teams, one dressed in black, one dressed in white and one ball. And the question came up on the screen, "How many times does the white team catch the ball?" And so we all watched intently and we were all pleased we've got the right answer. 13. Up comes the announcement that the answer is 13, but did you see the gorilla moonwalking in the background?

I didn't know what they were talking about until they showed the film again, the same film. And sure enough, whilst we were busy seeing who was catching the ball, there was a man in a gorilla suit Moonwalking right across the screen. And we didn't notice. I didn't notice. Many people didn't notice because we don't see what we're not looking for. Let's be attentive to the spirit of Jesus who accompanies us on our life's journey.

The second thing I noticed about this journey is that it's a journey which transforms the disciples. They're very different at the end of their journey when they get to Emmaus than they are at the beginning. And we should expect that our spiritual journey, the journey we make with God, will involve a process of transformation.

When we first meet the two disciples in this story, they're walking away from Jerusalem, towards Emmaus. They're downcast. Listen to the tense of the verb. They said, "We had hoped that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel. We had hoped." Their hope was passed. Yet, it was these two weary, confused agnostic followers of Jesus to whom Jesus came and blessed them with his presence. They weren't key or important apostles. They were ordinary followers. We only know the name of one of them, Cleopas. And they appear to be particularly dimwitted followers of Jesus. Yet, they were the ones to whom Jesus chose to appear and walked alongside.

And as they recognized Jesus, he disappears in that very moment that the penny drops. I've always thought that had I been one of these two disciples, I'd have found that very, very frustrating. I'd have said, "Oh, I just wish I'd asked him this. Why didn't I think? I was too slow. If I knew, I could have just had five more minutes with him." That's a common feeling.

There's a magazine in London called Time Out. They used to have a column called Once Seen, for people who'd had that kind of experience. In that column, you'd get ads like this, "Once seen. Fulham Broadway Station, fourth of the fourth, 9:30 PM. You, dark hair, beautiful eyes, brown jacket, briefcase. Me, black jacket, beard, box 1768." There's no sense that the two disciples we read about in this story would put an ad in the Jerusalem post, which would read anything like this, "Road to Emmaus, Easter Day, PM. You, bearded man, white robes, recently resurrected, scars on hands and feet."

There's no such ad because these two people had no such regrets. They were happy with the time that they'd had with Jesus. They weren't left wanting for more. Jesus told them all they needed to know. They didn't know everything, but they knew enough. They still had lots of unanswered questions, but they were certain about one thing: that Jesus was alive. The rumor of the resurrection was true. And this was enough to transform their situation.

Christian or Christianity doesn't have to mean an unappealing kind of narrow absolutism that claims to know all the answers to all the questions. Certainly, Episcopalianism doesn't get anywhere near that. Our

certainty is founded on the knowledge that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. That's enough. Our knowledge isn't dependent on our ability to know all the answers to life's big questions. We know enough, not everything. There's a certain elusiveness to the Christian faith, an enigmatic quality that we see most clearly, perhaps in the resurrection stories.

Just this story we've heard today, it leaves so many unanswered questions. Why don't Cleopas and his mate recognize Jesus? Why is only one name? Why does Jesus disappear the very moment that they recognize him? What does Jesus say when he explained the scriptures to them? Why isn't that written down? That would be helpful for us preachers. So many questions, so few answers. Yet, what's revealed is enough. It's enough to bring about an amazing transformation in these two disciples. By the end of their journey, their sadness has turned to joy. Their hope was restored. And understanding came where before that had been confusion.

Finally, this story emphasizes the fact that the Christian journey is not an individual pilgrimage. It's a journey we make together. We might have lost sight of that in this isolating time of pandemic, but it's no less true. We journey together in communion with others. After meeting Jesus on the road, Cleopas and his mate go straight back to Jerusalem and share their joy in what they have discovered with the disciples there.

We don't travel as a group of like-minded people like those disciples. What binds us together is not a common background, common belief system, common experience, or interests. Like those first disciples, we're a disparate band. We have different experiences, different political views, different ways of looking at the world. What binds us together is that we all share that new life that Jesus won for us that first Easter. We come with different questions, different answers, different experiences, but we need each other if we're to travel together, to get our full and rich and deep experience of what living the resurrection life is all about.

So, there's three things that this wonderful story, this resurrection story, tells us about our spiritual journey. We journey with Jesus. It's a journey of transformation, and it's a journey that we make company with others. Amen.