

St Bartholomew's Burnley, Sunday 19th April 2026
(Third Sunday of Easter)

Doubt and disillusionment, discouragement, and despair: these are emotions that are common to all of us at some point in our lives. We often describe them as dark sides of our life. Loss of a job, loss of a loved one, divorce, illness, even the loss of a pet, any of these things and more can throw us into a tailspin and fill our hearts with anxiety and fear. We think that things will never be right again. Especially in the middle of the night, things can seem at their very worst. We forget that there ever was a thing called hope, and all that we have learned about God's saving grace is nowhere to be found. If ever we knew how to call upon God, it is now only a distant memory, from a better and happier time; and even when we need God the most, we turn our backs on God and walk away.

Have you ever noticed that many letters in the English language that express disappointment or grief start with D. –doubt, dread, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despondency, depression, despair, and death to name many.

These words sum up how Cleopas and his companion were feeling as they fled and travelled from Jerusalem to Emmaus as we just heard in today's Gospel. They were leaving town because they thought they would be caught up in the violence of the angry mob-taking place in Jerusalem. They were bewildered and perplexed. Their lives as followers of the itinerant preacher, healer and teacher have been shattered, exposed and challenged. Their mental state I am sure would have been under duress. The master and teacher they had followed had been put to death in an excruciating and horrible way, and were they his followers to be next? This is the one that generations had hoped for. As they walked their dreams and hopes had been dashed.

I know I have similar thoughts and feelings at times when I reflect on my own hopes for the church and broader faith community, the struggles and disappointments about passing on the faith to our children and grandchildren and wondering where they will hear the story of the Prodigal Son or the parable of the Good Samaritan. I struggle with those who claim to be Christian yet live without any real understanding of what it means to be a disciple and to participate in a shared life in Christ. This has been highlighted in recent time with President's Trump's claims about God being on his side in the current war in the Middle East and his criticism of the Pope for daring to challenge political leaders who have no regard for the death of innocent individuals and who believe that might is right. I struggle to understand those who claim faith, but whose God and their readings of scripture differ significantly from mine and what I believe to be the faith of the Church? What is central this shared life and central to Christian faith and teaching are our relationships with one another and the whole of creation. To Love another as God loves us. The words of Jesus emphasize this when he says, "You are my friends if you do what I command you-love one another". {John 13:34-35}

Even the report of the women that Christ's tomb was empty failed to raise the spirits of Cleopas and his companion and instead probably confused them more. These two despondent disciples summed up their aspirations and feelings in these words, "we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free."

I am sure like me we have all travelled the Emmaus Road at times. In a conversation this week feelings of despair about the global situation at present were expressed in a way that suggested to me sentiments that Cleopas and his companion had spoken. At some time, in one way or another, our hopes may have been dashed, compromised, or challenged by family, friend's community, or we may have even felt abandoned by God. Sometime this may be in a big way and at other times on a small

scale. On other occasions we get angry with God and ask why me when something goes wrong, or we are confronted with tragedy or hurt? I remember being corrected by a faithful Christian who responded to this question with the words, why not you?

I am sure the disciples who were gathered at the Lake were experiencing a range of feelings including despondency, disappointment, disillusionment etc. Jesus reaches out and speaks to them at this time. They fail first to recognize him.

As we gather as Church, as the community of faith in this place, at this time, we are on a journey as we search and call a new priest. As we all know, as we struggle to get on with the task and stay committed to our ministry at St Barts , there can be moments of doubt, despair, frustration and disappointment. As I have said to others on previous occasions facing similar challenges it is easy to opt out, while staying in can also be risky. Sometimes we will stumble, other times we walk briskly and with confidence, still other times we wait with patience confident that in the spirit of the resurrection, the presence of the living God we will meet in a few minutes in the breaking of the bread is the same Jesus that Cleopas and his companion recognized at the crucial moment. It is at these times that we need to stick together to share in our community gathering around the table of hospitality, God's hospitality of fellowship and hope. When Jesus joins the two disciples leaving Jerusalem, he recognizes their fear and pain in the same way he recognizes ours.

And by the way it is alright to get angry with God. God I am confident is big enough to take it.

Amen