

## **The Third Sunday of Easter**

Our Gospel reading is Luke 24: 13-35

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road...?”

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, as many of those with DIY haircuts will testify. As I stand in the supermarket queue I wonder if some of those wearing masks are more concerned to protect their identity than their health. You wouldn't want to be recognised with a haircut like that.

The third Sunday of Advent and Lent are reminders that God is gracious, so too is the third Sunday of Easter. How often are we like those friends walking home sadly, perhaps having given up all hope, and only afterwards realising God was, is, alongside us, always.

God is gracious, this is something we learn very slowly. Most of the time even good people trying their best fail to trust in grace. Grace is something we can't control, it isn't something we can plan for or create strategies about. Grace is about waiting, and trusting, and watching. Grace is always first received.

In my last post I was also a member of our local NHS Hospital Trust Chaplaincy team. When I began I had to attend an induction day, there were about 200 people attending. I learnt three things about the NHS that day. The first was that everyone attended together. Porters, cleaners, nurses, consultants, administrators, surgeons, anaesthetists, security, everyone was together. That is significant, as an organisation the NHS has a different culture than most of us are used to.

The second was how dependent we are on trained medical staff from outside of the UK. Most of the nurses present were Spanish. Most of the doctors from overseas. I should have known this but it had never struck home how much it is the case.

The third lesson came through one of those exercises they make you do on days like this. We were given a slip of paper with an identity on it and we had to find the other person in the room with the same identity. There were 100 pairs to find each other. We were given 15 minutes to complete this task which I thought was rather optimistic given the number of people present.

But then something happened. Instead of people trying to find their matching partner everyone instinctively set about finding everyone else's partner. Porters and cleaners were telling surgeons and consultants where to go, nurses were getting administrators organised. It took 7 minutes and 12 seconds for everyone to find their other half. Quite astonishing. The NHS does things differently, and it works.

There is a culture within the NHS which trusts others first, it is why as a body of people the NHS delivers way beyond its means. It is fundamentally a culture of grace.

This way of doing and being is something that has shown itself to be resilient, enduring and patient, but it is not unbreakable and we take it for granted at our peril.

These are times of discovering grace. On a walk we bumped into a local family from our school and, at a suitable distance, asked how the children's lessons were going. The lad had built a kitchen bench with his dad from scraps of wood from the shed. I suspect that's an opportunity he will remember for life. On another walk we met a lady who lives round the corner, she told us that in the last two weeks she'd got to know more neighbours than in the previous ten years. We come home to find things on our doorstep, pillowcases to be turned into scrubs bags (thank you), hand sanitiser (thank

you), cakes (thank you), flowers (thank you), photographs to add to our church family (thank you) and a bottle of wine (thank you). And a golf ball – not sure about that.

The first thing about discovering grace is having the grace to accept that which is given. This isn't the usual way we do things. Maybe it needs to be part of the new normal, maybe we need to make it part of the new normal.

We walk a road we have not walked before and it is difficult. Like those friends long ago we mourn what is lost, we are saddened by suffering and death, we have no idea what lies ahead. But if we think we are heading home to life as it was then we need to think again.

There is an old Gaelic blessing which many people love, it goes;

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face; the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand.

'Until we meet again' runs very deep in these times. This is Easter, the hands that were pierced are the same hands that break bread. When God holds us in the palm of His hand those hands are still wounded hands. God is gracious and grace is costly.