

GOSPEL

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 23:13-35

They recognised Jesus at the breaking of the bread

That very same day, two of the disciples of Jesus were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but something prevented them from recognising him. He said to them, 'What matters are you discussing as you walk along?' They stopped short, their faces downcast.

Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days'. 'What things?' he asked. 'All about Jesus of Nazareth' they answered 'who proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they did not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.'

Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them. 'It is nearly evening' they said 'and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?'

They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, 'Yes, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.

This is the Gospel of the Lord

“...there is a constitutive truth in the discoveries of untutored intuition which the learned often miss or skip ; but that if it is to flourish into truthful meditation and not go astray along paths that are strange to it, it must be set in the particular human world to which it belongs..and which we hope to enter by right of our humanity, but also find surprising and odd because the mandate of history means that we come to it from a different context, both internally and externally.

..it is because the very business of looking at these pictures entails a contemplative waiting upon them which puts us alongside those who painted and viewed them so devoutly by putting us in the realm of prayer, with its passive expectancy, its active openness..a religious picture restored to its native context of worship..”

[Painting the Word ; John Drury ; Dean of Christ Church Oxford.]

..”...he went as if to go on..[he was not to force his presence on them]
...but they pressed him to stay with them..[pressed ..insisted..pleaded..encouraged]
...so he went in to stay with them..”

[invitation now to you & I to enter in & to stay with Him in it..]

cook [or servant?] only one standing..present but not fully included..just come into episode..yet been working on behalf of two disciples for some hours..what goes through his mind as he prepares meal for homecomers?..absent for so long & now returning under a cloud?..& surprisingly unexpectedly three for supper..three bread rolls & enough chicken & fruit for three..
headdress..skull cap..prayer cap?..right ear in light..aware open listening
..an intensesness of presence..head slightly to one side..full eye contact on Jesus..person not hand nor meal..
..right sleeve rolled up..arms hands used to washing up..fully involvement
..yet left hand grips belt on his tunic..locked out almost..a step too far in his involvement at this stage?..only hand of six in evidence “not doing”..
..whiteness of his right sleeve..his skull cap..& shirt collar includes him..
welcomes him into painting ..into story..into meal..when Jesus departs he leaves an empty chair at table..a bread roll & cup of wine..for the servant to sit down to ?..& servant becomes host..

..or is he not cook but leader of local synagogue..invited in to meet the man who explains scripture chapter & verse to us?..sleeve rolled up sign of his religious compliance..effort deep into sink of it..left hand gripping tight onto his beliefs in face of this challenge..to his beliefs & authority..light now passes him by..a Passover..leaving his shadow on wall behind real presence now of Risen Christ..

..arm & hand of Christ whilst blessing bread almost excludes prohibits cook..

a limit boundary includes disciple on our left..and disciple on our right marks out boundary to Jesus' right..old regime listened to..ritualised..dressed the part ..& now a new covenant relationship which includes envelops relationally at table..

..are there images of OT on table undercloth..a burning bush perhaps?..now overlaid with white cloth of meal..linen cloth..white of transfiguration..

Jesus ..young face yet face of experience..been there..knows..
reverence at significance of moment..right hand blesses water & wine..& disciples bread beyond..
..how would you describe right hand..in shape gesture?..trustworthy reliable human..ordinary..realistic..
..left hand more protective..gentler..[but thumb doesn't fit reality..strangely too long too bulky..why?]
..his inner garment red..love..passion..
..the right side of his outer white garment wrapped round his waist as if ready to wash feet of his disciples..Johns substitute story for eucharist..service eucharist in action..
..he leans on table..presides..no guest now but celebrant..
..red of his inner garment compliments red of rabbis garment..white on his outer garment complements white of cloth and on Cleopas shirt..Jesus on that boundary space "between" old & new..

disciple on right [Cleopas?]

..closest to Jesus..though on his left..house owner perhaps?
man of experience of life..long forehead..well worn beard..
big reliable trustworthy hands..working clothes..man of action..
shell on his lapel..of pilgrim..disciple.."heart identity on his sleeve"
.."you get what you see.."..genuine authentic
eyes attention total concentration wrapped in Jesus' right hand of blessing
..transfixed by it..& his own gesture of inclusion speaks of "yes but not just the bread but all of us and all of this..include ..through with & in Him.."
..a gesture of balance..& spanning darkness in back of picture right through to fullness of light & our presence at front..his left hand almost reaching out to us to invite us into relationship.."take hold whilst you can still reach me.."
napkin on his knee..his own place his own napkin in his own home..belonging included..readied for his withdrawal from meal & table..arrival or imminent departure?..
..his left ear in sight but in shadow..so keen now is his sightfulness..full presence..listening ear gives way to full sightedness..progress in faith?

..an artistic observation..shape composition..

..a triangular shape envelops all four characters..the hypotenuse of triangle from cook [rabbi] head down across Jesus' head to Cleopas' head & left hand ..then along table front to 2nd disciples chair..& back up to cooks head..
..top line = progression from qualified inclusion of Law & scripture..through Jesus blessing of bread wine in new covenant..& a then into universal inclusion in Cleopas gesture..

2nd disciple ..less seen less known..corner place..on edge of seat a chair of judgement..Pilate?..intent on Jesus left hand of blessing ..in contrast to Cleopas..
..an energy in way he grips chair arm..on edge of seat..attempting to get closer to action..drawn into it magnetic..
..furrowed brow peering to get more into it..straining
..attention to detail..small tear in sleeve of jacket shows white..
purposefully included..what does it try to say?
..sense of power..motive power..strength solidity reliability..
expectancy..wanting piece of action..thirst hunger to be included..

...story & revelation of contrast..

light /darkness..full light / shade..colours red /white..law / action..
..stand / sit..water /wine..bread / meat..fruit black /green grapes..
..grip of rabbi's left hand on belt / openness of Cleopas' left hand ..
two hands of Jesus..undercloth of tradition / new cloth of meal..
..seat of 2nd disciple / shell of journey of Cleopas..

..eye for detail..

fruit bowl on lip of table..basket weaving unthreaded..tear in 2nd disciples sleeve..imperfections in apple..chickens feet..pattern on dish..etchings on wine flagon..pattern on hem of undercloth..

...story open ending..what happens next ?..
..does Rabbi sit down to eat ..taking Jesus' place at eucharist?..
..welcomed fully or conditionally?..or in reverence is chair left empty?
..how many folk on edge of our eucharistic communities feel they stand & watch
..allowed to spectate but not to sit & eat..no communion..
..when did we last strain to get closer into it?..or gesture inclusion a welcome of all?
..could we focus fully on blessing the elements of our shared meal?..
..ever ready with a towel wrapped round waist ready to wash feet compassionately?
..when did we last celebrate eucharist..take bless break give..& always some left over..
..would our pilgrimage to date warrant an award of a shell? ..a badge of distinction..

..why is our eye & appetite taken by the chicken & fruit dish..instead of bread & wine? Almost an obstacle distraction for us ..in the way of us getting to heart of gospel and the real transubstantiation..transfiguration..

“..the individuality & community of sacrament mark it everywhere..” [Drury]