

It's very clear from the reading from the Book of Acts that we heard that Christians have been baptizing people for a very long time. Right back to the early church, St. Peter himself was imploring his hearers to repent and be baptized. And of course, over the centuries different understandings of baptism have emerged and why it's important. I'm not going to get into any of those controversies. It seems to me that the story, the gospel story we heard of Jesus meeting those two disciples on the road to Emmaus has much to say to us on the subject of baptism, none of which I don't think is controversial. Let me explain. I think that all Christians can agree that one of the most important things about baptism, if not the most important thing, is that it marks the beginning of a spiritual life, a spiritual journey, or at least an important stage in that journey, the spiritual journey that all of us make throughout our life.

And there is much that we can learn about that journey by looking together at the story of Jesus meeting those two disciples on the Emmaus Road. So that's what I want to do this morning, to pick out three points, that that gospel story that we heard read about Jesus walking with those disciples teaches us about our spiritual journey. The first thing to note is that we make our spiritual journey in a Christian understanding in the company of Jesus. We're told in the story that as the two disciples were walking to the town of Emmaus, Jesus himself came near and walked alongside them.

Jesus himself came near. In the Christian journey, we don't so much travel to God as travel with God in company, with a God made known in Jesus Christ. We don't see God as a prize waiting at the end of our journey. We journey not so much to God but with God. And this is the message of Pentecost, which is the next big festival that we'll be celebrating here in church. We celebrate then the coming of the Holy Spirit, God sending the spirit of Jesus with the disciples, that promise that the Spirit is with all believers now. Jesus promised his disciples that after he'd gone, he'd return to them by his spirit. And that's the promise that's fulfilled at Pentecost.

On that day, the spirit of Jesus was poured out on his disciples. The God who was made known in Jesus came and dwelt with his followers. Now, one of the words used to describe the Holy Spirit is *paraclete*, which is a nautical term. It means to draw alongside. It's like a little boat that comes alongside a big boat to guide it into the harbor. And you'll see the comparison that just as Jesus drew alongside these two disciples on the road

to Emmaus, so the Holy Spirit comes and draws alongside his people today and journeys with them and encourages them.

We don't simply journey to God. Thanks to the gift of the Spirit, we journey with God. And the flip side of this great truth is that we must be attentive to the spirit of Jesus and his presence in our lives. We certainly need to be more attentive than the two people in this story who didn't even seem to realize that Jesus was walking with them. Who knows how far they walked without recognizing who they were with? But they didn't recognize him because they weren't expecting him or looking for him. I once saw a great advert put out by the Cycling Awareness Trust to encourage drivers to look out for cyclists. And in this 20-minute video, there was two teams, one dressed in white, one dressed in black, and they each had a ball. And the question that came up on the screen was how many times did they throw the ball?

So you watched this intently and you count how many times, and at the end it says, and did you notice the gorilla walking across the screen? It was amazing psychological test because we all said "no." But when we watched it again, sure enough, when they're all throwing these balls, there's someone dressed in a gorilla suit, moonwalking across the back of the screen. None of us noticed because we weren't expecting to see a gorilla. We hadn't been told to look for a gorilla. We weren't paying attention.

We don't see what we're not looking for. So, let's be attentive to the spirit that dwells within us to God's presence in our lives. Let's be confident of that fact and expect to know that Jesus has drawn alongside and walks with us.

The second thing I'd note about this journey is that it's a journey that transforms the disciples. They are very different at the end of their journey than they are at the beginning. And we should expect that on our spiritual journey there'll be some sort of transformation, a process of transformation and renewal just as there were with these two disciples. When we first meet them, they're walking away from Jerusalem where Jesus has been crucified. They're walking to Emmaus. They're downcast. Look at the tense of the verb. We had hoped that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel. They've given up hope. Yet it was to these two weary, confused, agnostic disciples that Jesus came and blessed with his presence. They weren't key apostles; they were

ordinary followers. We only know the name of one, Cleopas. The other ones unnamed. They appear to be particularly dimwitted disciples. Yet, they were the ones with whom Jesus chose to walk.

And as soon as they recognize Jesus, he disappears. Just as the penny drops, Jesus withdraws from them. I've always thought that if this had happened to me, if I'd been one of those two disciples, I'd have felt very, very frustrated at this point. I'd have been thinking, "Ah, if only I'd asked him this, why couldn't I have five minutes more so I could really enjoy being with him?" If only. There's a magazine in London called *Timeout*. It used to have a rather sad section at the back called *Once Seen*. And they were people who were trying to find people they'd lost touch with, or just seen in passing, or wanted to be reacquainted with. So, you'd get adverts like this. This is a real one.

"Fourth of the fourth, Fulham Broadway station, 4:30 PM. You, dark hair, beautiful eyes, brown jacket, briefcase. Me, black jacket, beard. Box 1768." These two disciples didn't put a similar kind of advert in the *Jerusalem Post*. There was no "Road to Emmaus Easter Day pm. You, bearded white man, white robes, recently resurrected scars on hands and feet." No, there was none of that. These two men seemed to have no such regrets. They were happy with the time they'd spent with Jesus. They weren't left waiting for more. Jesus told them all they needed to know.

They didn't know everything, but they knew enough. They still had loads of unanswered questions, but they were certain of one thing, that Jesus was alive, and that was enough to transform their situation. Christian certainty doesn't mean a kind of well, a rather unappealing kind of narrow absolutism that claims to have all the answers. Our certainty is founded on the knowledge that Jesus has been raised from the dead. It's not dependent on our ability to know the answers to all of life's big questions. There's a certain elusiveness to the Christian faith and that's reflected in the story with all its unanswered questions. This story raises as many questions as it answers. Why don't Cleopas and his mate recognize Jesus? Why is only one named? Why does Jesus disappear as soon as he recognizes them?

And as a preacher, I want to know why aren't the words that Jesus said recorded? It says he explained all the scriptures to them. Well, that would make my life a lot easier if that had been written down. So many questions, so few answers. Yet, what's revealed is

enough. It's enough to bring about an amazing transformation in the disciples. By the end of their journey, their sadness has turned to joy. Their hope was restored and understanding came where there had been confusion.

And talking about confusion, before I go on to my final point, let me just clarify that I meant to say *Jesus had a white robe, not that he was white*, because that clearly, clearly is not right, and that saved me editing the tape that's gone out there. I can just imagine, that's the kind of thing that goes viral. "La Jolla rector claims that Jesus was white".

Finally, this story emphasizes the fact that the Christian journey is not an individual pilgrimage. It's a journey we make together. We journey in community with others. See how in the story, after meeting Jesus on the road, Cleopas and his mate run straight back to Jerusalem to share the news with the other disciples who were gathered there. They didn't keep it to themselves.

We travel with others. And like the disciples, we don't travel as a like-minded group bound together by common backgrounds and interests. We are a disparate group of people bound together by sharing in the new life that Jesus has won for us on that first Easter day. We come with different questions, different answers, different experiences, but we need each other if we're to grasp the reality of the new life that is offered to each one of us in Jesus Christ. We need to travel together to get that full, rich and deep understanding of what living the resurrection life is all about.

That unity in diversity is acted out in this very service by the fact we're all invited to come and share from one bread and one cup. The spiritual food for our journey is common. It's shared amongst us as a symbol of the fact that we travel together following Jesus on the way, we journey as one body, not just a collection of individuals. So three things that this great story tells us about our spiritual journey, which has begun today for Lucie, Mila, and Miles. We journey with Jesus. It's a journey of transformation and it's a journey we make in the company of others.

So as a sign of that, I invite you to stand and share the peace.

The Peace of the Lord be always with you.