

**'Emmaus: the Medium is the Message'
(A dramatic monologue)
Luke 24.13-35**

**The Revd Ivan Khovacs
St James's Piccadilly**

Sunday 30 April 2017

You may judge us – me and the other disciples – for living in an age of credulity: for being willing to believe any myth of creation or salvation. For confusing the zeal of revolution with Resurrection. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Make no mistake – sisters and brothers – how to tell the truth of that encounter, how to de-couple fact from fiction, the living history that was Jesus from the dying gods of the ancient Greeks and of our Roman Empire, that is the very thing we agonised about, – me and Cleopas, – on the road back to Jerusalem.

Don't for a minute think that Jesus rose above the incredulity of our age, that we were, somehow, privileged in making our case. I come from an age in which truth is collateral damage to the state and its instruments of power.

Go to your British Museum, look among the Roman antiquities. You will see a type of jewellery, a ring worn on the finger, dating from our time. The ring shows off a coin bearing the image of the Emperor. It is believed to be a powerful charm for luck.

But the truth is, that if you are among the very rich and can afford mounting a gold coin to wear on your finger, you really have no choice. Whether or not you believe in charms and good fortune is irrelevant: it is simply politically expedient to be seen, among your class, wearing an emblem of the Emperor, signalling that you are on the side of power. To do anything else would be unwise in an age of mendacity.

What is truth?

Pilate asked this of Jesus at his trial, even as the naked truth stood before him. But your age seems no less burdened with the question.

I read an article in one of your public parchments: The Guardian (2009). It said that only 25% of people in Britain believe in evolution, and that many are privately ambivalent about it. In fact, a full 50% of people in this country simply don't believe that evolution is true. What science knows to be factual, demonstrable, and true, half of all people reject in favour of some other story. So for all your cumulative scientific knowledge, your age may not be as enlightened over against ours as you may think.

But you of course, know this. Or you wouldn't be here today.

You might speak – in this age – about a post-truth, post-Trump America. You talk about “fake news”, that contradiction in terms that nevertheless is currency in late-night Twitter feeds from the centres of power. But how to speak truth, the truth of that encounter on the road to Emmaus? That was the only thing on our minds as Cleopas and I ran the seven miles back to Jerusalem.

And yet, I concede the point. How could Cleopas and I speak about something that by definition defies words? If this was Jesus in the flesh, – awakening in us new life, – how could we explain it to ourselves in a way that would make sense to us, let alone to the others?

The truth is, that whatever we had to say came at a price. Our very character was questioned by our closest friends. Our motives were dismissed in whispers. We were chided for nursing illusory hopes in the throes of our grief. And we were simply told that we were unreliable. We were mocked by those who had shared with us life with Jesus on the roads of Palestine.

See for yourself: in Mark's Gospel, you will find tucked away in a verse something of our struggle when he says that: "Jesus appeared on another occasion to two disciples, as they were walking into the country. But when they went back and told the rest, they did not believe them" (Ch 16.12-13).

How could we put the Resurrection into words? Answer: only very badly.

Eventually, everything would come to light. And it would happen in the composite picture of the risen Christ from the collective re-telling of the disciples. Our rekindled relationships were the only thing we had. Because words alone would never do as witness.

For with Christ, the medium is the message. This truth could only be lived. And this truth could only be believed on the evidence of transformed lives. Lives lived, not for self, but for others.

We have learned to question everything. And we demand the verification of restored relationships. And so faith in the risen Christ is confirmed by the character witness of faith: a faith that clothes the naked and feeds the hungry, a faith that cares for widows and orphans; a faith that forgives the wrongdoing of enemy and friend.

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Make no mistake – sisters and brothers – we were walking away from Jerusalem. This was not the company we were looking for. God met us when we were walking away from God. But – in his grace – God found us, when we didn't know to look for him. Because to us, God was dead.

Make no mistake – sisters and brothers, – God the creator, who gives himself endlessly to his creation, met us in Jesus the risen Son at that supper in Emmaus. He put himself into our hands. Then our minds were opened. And everything that had happened up until that point was re-configured before our very eyes.

When he was at the table with us,
he took the bread. He blessed it and broke it. And gave it to us. (Luke 24.30)

And even as he vanished from our sight, we knew him in the breaking of the bread.

Our philosophers would tell us that one cannot change the past. But that is exactly what happened. Cleopas and I re-traced our journey, and recounted our story to one another.

Were not our hearts burning within us while Jesus was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us? (Luke 24.32)

On the road to Emmaus, our hearts burned with grief. And that sense of loss will never, ever go away.

But in that moment, when our Guest became our host, we were given a voltage of life we could only call love, something our hearts would forever palpitate to; we would nourish a newfound faith in our fellow humanity.

That joy propelled us back to Jerusalem, back to the hiding place where the other disciples were at a loss. They too were bereaved. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and the other women, had already found the empty tomb. Peter, too.

And that is what was so painful: our newfound love was met with unbelief.

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And truth be told, if I could, I would give it up many times over. How many times have I wished away that journey. That supper. That irreversible moment. That undeniable Presence, in humility, offering itself freely, once again.

How many times did I wish it had been an illusion from which I would recover? I imagined eventually getting over the disappointment of Jesus on the cross. And I would have just as soon stayed in Emmaus, lived out my days, quietly, in sober reflection.

The risen Christ was baggage I did not need for a quiet life's journey.

But broken bread opened up that infinite horizon: God among us, God so free in himself as to allow our words to speak for him. God allows our faith to be his living witness.

And so as we neared Jerusalem, Cleopas and I were ready to take the greatest imaginable risk. **We would tell the truth.**

We found the eleven disciples and other companions gathered together. And we simply said,

He is risen.

He is risen indeed. (Luke 24.34)

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Sisters and brothers ...

Make no mistake: if He rose at all it was as His body. If the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules reknit, the amino acids rekindle, the Church will fall.

It was not as the flowers, each soft Spring recurrent. It was not as His Spirit in the fuddled eyes of the eleven apostles. It was as His flesh: ours.

The stone is rolled back, not papier-maché, not a stone in a story, but the vast rock of materiality that in the slow grinding of time will eclipse for each of us the wide light of day.

Let us not seek to make it less of a scandal for our own convenience, our own sense of beauty, lest, awakened in one unthinkable hour, we are embarrassed by the miracle, and crushed by remonstrance.

And if we will have an angel at the tomb, make it a real angel, weighty with physics, vivid with hair, opaque in the dawn light, robed in real linen spun on a definite loom.

Let us not mock God with metaphor, analogy, sidestepping, transcendence; making of the event a parable painted on the faded credulity of earlier ages: let us walk through the door.¹

**Alleluia! Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!**

¹ Adapted from John Updike's poem "Seven Stanzas At Easter"
<https://goo.gl/FdEi1a>.