

The Road to Emmaus

a sermon given by the Revd Canon Dr Andrew Wingate OBE
at Holy Trinity, Dunfermline, on Saturday 18 April 2015
on the occasion of the Institution of the Revd Alison Cozens
The readings were 2 Corinthians 4:5–12; Luke 24:13–35

This is the third of the Resurrection appearances on which I have preached during this beautiful Easter season. The first was on Easter Day itself, as Jesus encountered Mary Magdalene in the Garden. At first Jesus is concealed, he seems to be the gardener. But she recognises him as he addresses her most beautifully by name, 'Mary'. She is known as a woman who has sinned much – but he accepts her as she is, and she, a woman, becomes the first to be sent as a witness, to tell the brothers, 'The Lord is risen.' How sad that it has taken so many centuries to ordain women to full leadership in our church. And now in quick succession we have three women ordained to be Bishops in the Church of England. It is good that your new priest Alison has been on a group at Lambeth to encourage such leaders to be prepared. But of course, Mary here represents all women, not just those in high office. Women have always been the majority in all our churches, responding to the call of the risen Lord, by name.

Then, last Sunday, the appearance to Thomas, in the upper room. Thomas for ever afterwards in the West known as Thomas the Doubter, because he insists on touching the wound in Jesus' side, and seeing the nail marks – before he will believe. He represents, to my mind, the western believer – scientific, rational, proof from the five senses, is necessary before we can believe, before we can put away our scepticism. This is the philosophy made popular in the 18th century in Scotland by David Hume, in England by Bishop Berkeley. This is post-enlightenment thinking. In India, where I used to work, we find a very different understanding of Thomas –

he was not the doubter, but the one who went from Palestine, via Antioch in Syria – ironically then the safe place for early Christians – and then across the Arabian sea to Kerala in Western India. So was founded the earliest churches in India, before there was Christianity in Scotland or England, today known as the St Thomas Christians, including the branch in communion with Anglicans, the Mar Thoma Church. The one who doubted becomes the Apostle to India, and much celebrated as such.

And then today, the story of the two disciples walking to their village of Emmaus, and Jesus comes to walk with them – again an enigmatic presence – 'they were kept from recognising him.' They were in discussion about the scriptures, and the events they had experienced, and the testimony of the women. But they had not believed. It must have been a confusing walk as they came away from the city, and went back home, and reflected on what might have been – a walk of deep sadness. But, by the end of the story, they have recognised the risen Lord – through his walking with them on the road, and his deep attention to them; through his interpretation of the events as they had lived through them, and his bringing out the meaning of the scriptures; and through his breaking bread with them in their house. This had required them to invite him into their house, to give hospitality to a stranger. Their excitement was palpable – I have travelled the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and it is not easy country – to go back again immediately, shows the power of what they had experienced – 'The Lord has risen indeed – and he is known to us in the breaking of the bread.'

Alison comes back to Scotland, having been inspired by her time in Edinburgh. She came to Leicester, to a tough situation, to a parish that is by far majority Muslim, with probably more buildings of other faiths in the parish than almost anywhere in England, and with seemingly a new mosque opening every month. There she found amazing faith, as I too have experienced through being able to share in her ministry often, mainly to the Caribbean Anglicans of this part of Leicester, a very faithful community, deeply devoted to the risen Lord, whom they have encountered, as did those early disciples, in a village called Emmaus, with their centring on the eucharist, and on prayer. For the older ones it is a village in Antigua or Barbados or Montserrat. Many have not had an easy life, but they know deeply the power of their Easter faith. And I know that Alison experienced that faith through them.

So she comes to you. And in this very different context in Fife, she will not bring Christ, but find Christ meeting her, in Dunfermline and Rosyth. The places of encounter in ministry that she will experience, and bring from Leicester, are found in these three resurrection appearances. The first, to Mary in the garden, is what we call an I-Thou meeting. Jesus looks Mary in the eye, and addresses her by name. He meets her in her need where she is. This is the quiet, but central area of ministry. The individual encounter, meeting people where they are. This is profoundly moving, and is why, if you look on the Internet, you will find literally hundreds of great paintings depicting this meeting in the garden – ‘noli me tangere’ is what you need to put into the search engine – I had better not say Google search engine! Don’t touch me. Jesus is often holding a hoe to indicate that he looks like the gardener. Mary wants to keep him there. I think many of the people of St Peter’s, Leicester wanted to keep Alison there – and certainly the Dean of Leicester wanted to keep Peter with

him as his PA. But Alison was called by your Vestry to move on. But here the essence of ministry will be the same – getting to know you, and addressing you by name.

The Thomas story also has deep links with Christian ministry. Thomas doubted, as do so many people today – and even if we are not doubting at this minute, for most of us, there will be periods of doubt, or moments of doubt. Alison will not be able to cure those doubts by intellectual arguments, but by helping people to touch the risen Lord, to experience Christ in their lives. As Augustine puts it, it is ‘faith seeking understanding’, not understanding leading to faith normally. Last night there was a chilling programme on BBC2 – look on your iPlayer – ‘Kill the Christians.’ It was a survey of Christians in the Middle East today. What stood out was their unshakable faith in the face of terrible persecutions. This was faith in the crucified and Risen Lord – not faith based on reason.

Then the call to evangelism, to sharing the good news of the Resurrection. The Indian Thomas. I have a painting by an Indian Christian of Thomas reaching out to touch Jesus. It is a very radical one, Jesus is portrayed as an untouchable, a Dalit, and Thomas is portrayed as a Brahmin, as from the highest caste, who would normally not even allow the shadow of an untouchable near them. This was the Apostle Thomas, bring a resurrection gospel to all, without difference of caste or race or gender or sexuality – all are one in him. This is the gospel Alison is called to be an evangelist for, in your two communities, as she was in the heart of multicultural Leicester.

And the Emmaus story – represents the heart of Christian ministry – listening and talking on the road, being the third person in the encounter between people, drawing out the meaning of experiences heard, and of the links with Christian scripture, and then the simple acts of eucharist, of communion, on big days like this, but especially when

two or three are gathered together. This is what Alison experienced week by week in the St Peter's Tuesday morning eucharist, as I have done, ever faithful fifteen people, finding Christ in the heart of their lives. In my study I have a wonderful reproduction of a painting by Rembrandt of the Emmaus meal. I inherited it from my father, also a priest. The light shines from Christ, in the darkness. That is what is at the heart of the eucharist, as Alison has experienced it.

And finally, the Epistle. This is about the tough side of ministry, as experienced so much by St Paul. Alison has experienced this in Leicester – two examples:

A large old building, and the immense hope of getting a major lottery grant, and, even with the support of the City Mayor and the Bishop, failing. Having to be alongside the crushed people of the congregation who love this building.

And then four murders in the parish a couple of years ago, involving Asians and Caribbeans. The whole community rent apart: the place St Peter's and Alison herself played in a ministry of reconciliation, including taking the funeral of a murdered black person. The trauma during the long trial, when it turned out members of the congregation had close relatives ending up in prison. 'Perplexed', and Alison having to minister to them – struck down and not destroyed – and her listening role with them.

So a tough, but rich, ministry she is leaving. But not leaving behind – she brings with her all this experience, and also she feels the excitement of returning to her beloved Scotland, coming back within sight of the Forth. And here she will be a gift for you, as she ministers to you, and is ministered to by you, in your two parishes. She is excited, and I am sure you are also. God bless you in these coming weeks and months, as you get to know each other.

And in Peter too you have a special gift, a true deacon, very different from Alison, who will give much to you, and receive much from you in his own right. You will miss swinging the incense as well as any Caribbean, but will find something else here! God bless you too, Peter.

The Revd Canon Dr Andrew Wingate was until recently a Chaplain to The Queen. He is now Canon Theologian of Leicester Cathedral, and Associate Priest at St Philip's Church, the next-door parish to St Peter's, where Alison served.

Andrew's ministry has centred on theological education. A Lecturer at the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Madurai, South India, he became Principal of the West Midlands Ministerial Training Course, Queen's College, Birmingham, and then Principal of the United College of the Ascension in Selly Oak.

He went to Leicester in 2000, as Director of Ministry and Canon Theologian, and was founding director of the national and international St Philip's Centre, for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith society. He has close links with Sweden, and the Porvoo Communion, where he helps the churches relate across faiths. He has published eight books, the most recent (SPCK, 2014) being *The Meeting of Opposites? Hindu-Christian meeting in the West*.

Andrew received an OBE in the 2011 New Years Honours List for his inter faith work.



Rembrandt's first Supper at Emmaus (1628)