

Theme: **Learning about God's character from the Easter stories**

Passages: **Luke 24.13-35, Acts 2.14a, 36-41**

**Some of the main themes from the sermon**

**What sort of a God do we worship?**

This is an important question. How we understand God's character influences how we behave and what we consider to be acceptable behaviour in others. We have seen this in the news in the recent past. Today's sermon explores what we can learn about God's character from the resurrection narratives, focussing particularly on the story of the road to Emmaus.

**The sheer beauty of the encounter on the road to Emmaus**

This is one of the most loved of all Bible passages, up there with the parable of the prodigal son and the beginning of John's Gospel. Let's see why it grips us so by walking with Cleopas and his companion. They are walking home on the first Easter Day, disconsolate after Jesus', crucifixion. A stranger (Jesus) joins them but they don't recognise him (v13-17). They ache with loss and their disappointment is intense (v17-21) as they recount the story of Good Friday. They have heard about the empty tomb and the story that Jesus is alive but it makes no sense (v22-24). The stranger explains how it does actually make sense in the light of the Jewish Scriptures. It was how it had to be (v25-27). As they reach their destination, they press the stranger to join them and then, as he breaks the bread and gives thanks, their eyes are opened and they recognise the risen Jesus (v28-32). Not surprisingly they go to share their good news with the other disciples (v33-35).

**What do the resurrection narratives tell us about God?**

It is clear from Peter's sermon at Pentecost that, for the disciples, God's defining characteristic was that he raised Jesus to life. (Acts 2.32). In raising Jesus, God affirmed him as 'both Lord and Messiah' (Acts 2.36). So what does this tell us about God's character?

**1. God, in the risen Jesus, seeks out his followers**

In all the resurrection narratives Jesus comes to meet his disciples. He seeks them out. It's clear that he values them, knows them (with all their foibles) and meets them in such a way that they can recognise him and be filled with the joy that this recognition brings. Interestingly this means different things for Mary, Peter, Thomas and Cleopas. Jesus knows each of them by name.

**2. God, in the risen Jesus, comes alongside them when they are at our lowest ebb**

For understandable reasons, the disciples are bereft. It is in this lostness that Jesus comes to them. Mary, Peter, Thomas and Cleopas were each lost in a different way but they were all lost and Jesus found them and they each found their true life in the risen Jesus

**3. God, in the risen Jesus, invites them but does not compel them to believe and follow him.**

All the accounts of Jesus' resurrection have an air of mystery about them. That is part of their mesmeric beauty. However, it is also a little perplexing. The disciples are confused about what's happening. They remember strange, seemingly inconsequential details. Jesus forbids Mary from holding on to him but invites Thomas to put his hand in his side. You'd think the disciples could get their act together a bit better! And yet it is clear that this very openness is a result of God being God. He doesn't force his way into our world or our lives.

**What difference did it make to us?**

God's character doesn't change. Jesus then is Jesus now. He meets us by his spirit and greets us, risen from the tomb now as he did then. He seeks us. He catches us at our lowest ebb and he gently invites us to be his people. What began at the resurrection and got turbocharged at Pentecost carries on today.

***Some questions for thought and discussion this week:***

- 1. Do you have experience of God meeting you at a time when you were at a low ebb? Share your experiences.*
- 2. Do you think we are more open to God's voice when we are in difficult times? If so, why might this be?*
- 3. How do you think God makes himself particularly known to you. Is it through music, nature, poetry, mathematics, the wonder of the universe?*
- 4. If Jesus seeks us, how do we help other people to be in a place to welcome him?*
- 5. Were there any other issues that the sermon raised for you?*

***Quote of the week (from the hymn 'Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son'):***

*'Lo Jesus greets us, risen from the tomb.*

*Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom'*

*(From the Easter hymn 'Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son')*