



Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Third Sunday of Easter

readings: [Acts 2.14a, 36-41](#) , [I Peter 1.17-23](#), [Luke 24.13-35](#)

23 April 2023

Two images came to me when considering today's Gospel. The first one that of the road, a fairly obvious one given the passage we've just heard; the second and perhaps not so obvious, that of the googly. So firstly to the googly, a cricketing term, which came to my mind because Eastertide and the start of the cricket season usually coincide. And as someone who still plays a few matches a year I find that there is a certain frisson about this time, albeit one that is quickly dispelled after the first game, when I am reminded of my own inadequacies.

The googly, to be technical, refers to those instances when it looks like the bowler, a right armed leg spinner to be precise, is delivering the sort of ball that the batter expects to spin away from them when it is pitched, but that actually does the opposite, of turning towards them, often leading to their dismissal. And so, as in cricket, also in life, there are those times when a googly is bowled our way; something unanticipated is delivered to us, and we find ourselves undone, with our stumps in disarray.

We will know from our painful experiences that googlies delivered to us can take many forms; perhaps the breakup of a relationship, redundancy, involvement in an accident, receiving sobering news about our health, the loss of someone who is close to us. These sorts of things can leave us feeling bewildered and disorientated, no longer knowing which way we are facing and unsure of how one thing relates to anything else, perhaps asking where the road on which we now find ourselves, and our second image for today, is leading. At times of such real anguish, God can seem a long way away and we may even wonder whether there is a God at all.

And so to today's Gospel. Here we find Cleopas and his companion on a road that is leading away from Jerusalem towards the village of Emmaus, about seven miles from the city. They have been on the receiving end of the most dramatic of googlies, a googlie twice over, if you like, which has left their world turned upside down and shaken about.

Jesus, the one whom they had followed and come to know and trust and love, the one in whom they had placed all of their hopes, has experienced a horrible death. For sure, he had spoken of it, but even so, this wasn't what they'd wanted or at some level really expected. But now grief stricken for their Lord and Master, their friend, they also fear for their own safety. It is no wonder, then, that they are leaving the scene of such terror. After all that's why some of the other disciples had chosen, instead, to lock themselves away.

With all that trauma to deal with, most of us would be disorientated. But to compound matters, things have taken another unexpected turn; they have learnt from the women in their group that this same Jesus is now alive; how can this possibly be? It's perhaps no surprise that they aren't seeing clearly when they are joined by a stranger on the road.

Significantly, though, they are joined; they are accompanied, and not by any old stranger. This stranger takes a keen interest in their conversation. He comes alongside them in their fear, in their grief,

and in their not knowing what on earth to believe about news of resurrection. He walks with them even though he knows they are going in the wrong direction. And only then, after having taken all of their experiences seriously, does he begin to address them.

Breaking open the Scriptures, he helps them to see that what has been going on over these few bewildering days is the fulfilment of God's on-going relationship with his people and his world. He enables them to begin to make sense of these profound experiences in the light of God's love for them, even though they don't seem able to see that it is, in fact, Christ who is with them on the road.

But then, in the breaking of the bread, there comes that point of recognition. Here they find themselves in the presence of the true companion which, by very definition, from the Latin, is the one with whom we share bread. 'Then', we read, 'their eyes were opened'. They may have been a bit slow on the uptake but now the penny has dropped, and they finally see Jesus. It's a gift, a moment of disclosure, and in this experience of personal recognition, their lives are transformed. Now they can see and everything is different. Now they understand why it was that their hearts burned as they walked with the stranger on the road, and no longer is the road the place on which they are lost. Now it is the location of purpose as they turn around with hope renewed, and head back to Jerusalem to find the other disciples.

All of the Gospels in this Easter season, are, not surprisingly, ones of encouragement, to a group of people who were scattered and at a loss, and today's is no exception. Although, we, unlike those first disciples on the road, come to this passage knowing that Jesus is risen, yet it gives us a story of disorientation turning to re-orientation, of how bewilderment and confusion are changed to promise and hope, and of terrible sadness being transformed into sheer delight.

Moreover, it encourages us to believe and trust that wherever we find ourselves in life, whatever googlies it bowls at us, and on whichever road and direction they leave us travelling, the risen Christ, whether we're able to acknowledge his presence or not, is one who comes to walk alongside us, to begin the process of making sense of our experiences.

Thomas Merton, the 20th century American Trappist monk, mystic, poet, and social activist produced a wonderful prayer in his work, *Thoughts in Solitude*. Merton prays:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

If, when confronted by life's googlies, we are willing to open ourselves to our rich Christian faith with its story of God's resurrection life and love for us and for all God's world, coming together in prayer, engaging with the Scriptures, and gathering in the company of others to share in broken bread, we may just discover that our hearts are kindled and that we find ourselves being turned around and led in a new direction, with renewed life and hope, towards a new Jerusalem.

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