

Looking back and Looking forward:
The Walk to Emmaus
Sermon for Evensong on Easter Day 2025

The Dean joins the disciples walking away from Jerusalem after the death of Jesus and wondering what the future holds.

They were looking back
as they headed away from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Trudging along the road,
sharing their memories, trying to make sense of it all.

Looking back
on the horrors of Jesus' arrest, trial and execution.
Looking back over three years following Jesus, witnessing his miracles, sharing
meals together, hearing him teach.

Looking back on three wasted years.
Looking back on lost hopes.
Lost hopes for a new kingdom.
Lost hopes for freedom.

Then the stranger came alongside them and asked about their sorrowful
faces,
so they talked about Jesus,
remembering him as the one that they had hoped would be the one to save
Israel from captivity under Roman rule.
They told the stranger
what they had seen and heard.
They told him about their lost hopes.

What did they have to look forward to now?

They were leaving Jerusalem to escape the possibility of persecution or arrest
themselves.

Looking forward to coming to terms with failure.
Looking forward to picking up the pieces of their lives.
Looking forward in fear, confusion and uncertainty.

Then the stranger began to look back,
unfolding the past in a different way.
The stranger spoke about the scriptures
so that they began to understand things differently. He talked about the
prophets
and explained what they were looking forward to. Talked about God's plan
in ways that made sense of suffering and death.
They began to understand that the things that they had hoped for were not
part of God's plan.

They heard how God sent his Son,
not as a powerful king but as a suffering servant.
They heard how the Messiah
would take up his throne in Heaven,
not in a palace in Jerusalem.

They looked back and the past looked different.

Did they wonder if the future might look different too?

As they arrived at the house of a friend,
they invited the stranger to share their evening meal.
Someone washed the dust off their feet.
They were led to the table.
As they sat, did they look back
and remember the last meal that they had shared with Jesus?
The meal where he had taken the bread,
blessed it, broken it and shared it with them?

The meal where Jesus had looked forward to his death, although they had
not understood that at the time?
They sat together and invited the stranger to pray as they gathered around
the table in Emmaus.

The stranger became the host.
The food was laid on the table,
and the stranger took the bread.
He blessed it, broke it and shared it....

And they saw HIM !

They saw JESUS ,
not a stranger, not dead, not absent,
but their friend, alive and present with them.

The future looked different now.
They looked ahead and saw new possibilities.
They looked ahead and saw new life.
They looked ahead and wondered....

We can only hear this story as people who look back and see the past through the lens of the present. We hear the story of Jesus' death already knowing about his resurrection.
We know that those three years were not wasted, but were preparation and sign.

Preparation for the disciples to become the church.
A sign of how the church should be.
A church of service, of love, of healing, of celebration, of hope.

As we come to the end of our Easter celebrations, let us look back with thanksgiving on all that has been.
On the music, the worship, the words, the sights and the sounds which have helped us
to walk with Jesus on the way of the cross
and to greet him with joy as we celebrate his resurrection.

As we come to the end of our Easter celebrations, let us look forward and ask ourselves,
how does this story change my life?
What will be different this time tomorrow,
this time next week, this time next month for me?
How will I continue to live the resurrection life? How will I help to build up the church to be a sign of the kingdom, to be a sign of service, of love, of healing, of celebration, of hope.
May this be for you, a time of looking back and of looking forward. Looking back in thanksgiving and looking forward in hope.