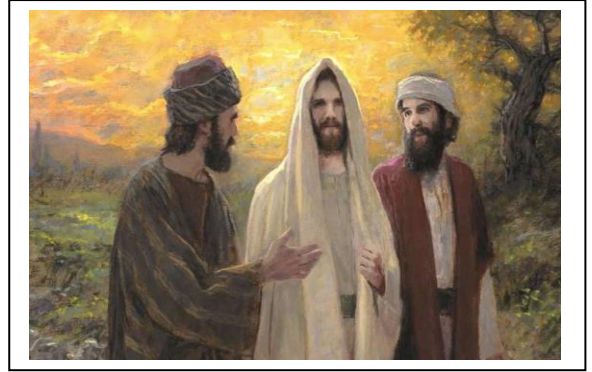


SUNDAY 23rd JULY 2023

Scripture: Luke 24:13-34

ANXIOUS OR LISTENED TO?

Have you ever put your heart into something or someone only to be left disappointed and disillusioned because the result was not what you expected or even wanted?



Think of your football team. They have a few wins and go higher on the ladder only to lose a few important games and back down they go. Do you berate the coach or the players or just walk away whingeing.

We just heard the story of 2 of Jesus' followers who had been relying on Jesus to redeem Israel; to rescue the nation from its enemies.

Most Jewish people believed the Old Testament prophecies pointed to a military or political Messiah. But Jesus had come to redeem people from slavery to sin, not to overthrow an outside enemy, but to free people from an inside enemy who places doubts in our minds, leading us to ignore God and His commands.

When Jesus was crucified, these 2 followers lost all hope and felt anxious about their future direction. They had set all their dreams on Jesus, but they felt He hadn't come through.

What did they do? They picked up their "bat and ball" and headed back home – they withdrew.

Is that something you do when you feel let down, anxious, feel like hope has gone? You take yourself out of the equation and back home, shut the door and let your thoughts ruminate about the “what do I do know?”

The two followers were walking in the wrong direction – away from the fellowship of other believers where they could find support.

That is why we gather to be able to support one another when someone is having a difficult time.

We all experience anxiety from time to time, which is triggered by our thoughts. But if we don't actively seek support, talk it over with someone who will listen and not judge, our anxiety sets up home within our body.

And we can recognise anxiety by how our body reacts:

Racing heart; dry mouth; sweating; inability to concentrate; muscle tension; aches; pains; headaches; insomnia; irritability and exhaustion.

Not a pretty picture.

What can we learn from Jesus' response to the 2 followers?

He didn't reveal who He was as soon as He caught up with them, which would have dispelled all their doubts.

Instead, He chose to listen and gently meet them where they were at. He took the time to explain the scriptures to help them see things from another perspective.

He walked alongside them. He asked open ended questions. He let them speak and He really listened to understand their pain.

When we interact with people, do we take the time to walk alongside them – to meet them where they are at with all their questions and heartbreaks?

These followers knew the tomb was empty. They had heard the women's story which had been verified by some of the disciples, but still didn't believe.

Today, the resurrection still catches people by surprise. Despite 2000 years of evidence and witness, many people still refuse to believe.

What more will it take?

For these followers, it took the living Jesus in their midst.

For many people today, it takes the presence of alive Christians.

The followers' anxiety and confusion were eased as Jesus responded by going to Scripture and applying it to His ministry.

When we are puzzled by questions or problems, we too can go to Scripture and find authoritative help. We can also turn to other believers who know the Bible and have the wisdom to apply it to our situation.

Christ is the thread woven through all the Scriptures, the central theme that binds them together.

Faith can be a big support for those struggling with anxiety, because it gives a bigger perspective and reminds us that God is in control.

It encourages us to simplify our life and remember what really matters.

Times of prayer can help calm nerves, focus our mind and limit panic or waves of anxiety.

Closing prayer:

Lord Jesus, who for love of our souls entered the deep darkness of the cross, we pray that Your love may surround all who are in darkness of great mental distress and who find it difficult to pray for themselves.

May they know that darkness and light are both alike to You and that You have promised never to fail them or forsake them.

We pray in Your name. Amen.