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Christ is alive! Really? Where do we find him? In Liturgy

The Revd Dr Hannah Cleugh, Senior Chaplain to the Bishop of Ely
hannah.cleugh@elydiocese.org

The first liturgical encounter with the risen Christ? Supper at Emmaus

There are lots of different ways in which we might approach the question of how we encounter the risen Christ in our liturgy. We might look at lots of different liturgies, for example, Easter liturgies, everyday liturgies, and reflect on how they differently reflect Christ. But what I thought would be good, especially because it's Sunday morning and we shall shortly be going over to the cathedral to encounter Christ, we hope, in the liturgy there, is to frame our reflections in terms of what I think it's reasonable to suppose is the first liturgical encounter with the risen Christ. On the evening of the first Easter Day two disciples have supper with him at Emmaus. So let's start with this passage:

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

[Luke 24:13-35 NRSV]

In that passage there are a number of things to which we'll return as we think together. First of all, it takes place in a particular time and in a particular place. It is 'the same day', the first Easter Day, it is evening, and the disciples are going to a village called Emmaus. It is specific. The liturgy we encounter, where we encounter the risen Christ, takes place in our specific circumstances, in our everyday – it takes our ordinary everyday and makes it extraordinary.

As the disciples go along they talk about what has happened, and while they're talking and discussing Jesus himself came near and went with them. Christ reaches out to them, enters into their conversation. But they don't immediately recognise who it is. As with the other resurrection appearances there's something mysterious about the risen Christ. The disciples can't recognise this person with whom they're so familiar. They carry on talking and what becomes apparent is that Jesus enters into the story they're telling.

They're telling the story of what's happened, and they're trying to understand it. There's something about our liturgical encounters that's an engagement with the story. We tell a story. We witness to a story. We place ourselves in that story. The conversation goes on, the disciples talking with the stranger as they come into the village of Emmaus. They invite him to stay with them. That word 'stay with us', 'remain with us', 'abide with us', which is so important in John's

Gospel, is important here. Christ stands at the door and knocks. He doesn't force himself to go to supper with the disciples; they don't have to invite him in. But they do, and Jesus goes in to stay with them. They go to the table and he takes bread, blesses, breaks it and gives it to them.



In this picture of the supper at Emmaus by Titian we see Jesus sitting, hands outstretched to bless the bread in the same composition as in pictures of the Last Supper. It's the same here in the Carravaggio painting, hands outstretched. Titian's Supper at Emmaus particularly references Last Supper paintings. We've got the disciples there, we've got the dog under the table referencing the conversation with the Syro-Phoenician woman. It is a deliberate echo.

So, too, here in the text, Jesus takes bread, blesses, breaks it, gives it to them – what that great scholar of liturgy Gregory Dix calls the four-fold action of the liturgy. This is what Jesus has done at the feeding of the 5000 in John,

it's what he's done at the Last Supper and it's what he does here. Liturgical language – that's what the disciples heard. It deliberately references back to the promises Jesus had made when he shared bread with them before.

And so the disciples recognised him. They recognised him just as he vanished from their sight. Their encounter is transformative; it suddenly makes sense; all the pieces fall into place and they understand the conversation they have just had. They recognise Christ who is just beyond their grasp, even as he's been sitting at the table with them. And they suddenly realise that other things – the conversations they've had – make sense in ways they had not understood.

This is transformative. It is already evening, we're told, and they've already walked seven miles, but they go back to Jerusalem where they find the other disciples and they witness to what has happened. This is transformative encounter in bread, in word, with the risen Christ, and it sends the disciples back as changed people. They go back to witness to the Christ they've just met.

Now I'll leave the pictures of the supper at Emmaus to help you to reflect, and also to use the images from the supper to feed back into the other things we shall explore.

But before we move on I'd like you to take a moment, either on your own or in small groups, to

reflect: When have you encountered Christ in the liturgy?

What was the context or occasion? Was something different from usual, or was the usual somehow different? What did it feel like? What changed for you? What has made it difficult for you to encounter Christ in liturgy?

You might then like to ask the question, what has made it difficult for you to encounter Christ in the liturgy? That might help you to think about the other side of the issue, those occasions when liturgy has not helped you encounter the risen Christ, and what it was about that that made that so.

Let's take a couple of minutes to do that.

[People set about the task enthusiastically. After a couple of minutes Hannah called the meeting to order]

In a brief feedback session it was suggested that sometimes people try to control the liturgy too much, and that it's better to 'let go and let God'. Someone said that she found saying in the Eucharist, 'I am not worthy to receive you but only say the word, Lord, and I shall be healed' moved her every time. Hannah pointed out that particular liturgical phrases can speak profoundly to people. Another person shared an occasion in which a Maronite Archbishop had said the Eucharistic Prayer in Aramaic, the language of our Lord, 'and I just felt that we were there with our Lord at the supper.' Hannah commented that things like that can suddenly collapse the time. Someone else commented that attending Eucharist in a foreign church and realising that the same liturgy in a different language was taking place in his home church and feeling at one with both communities and with Christ. Someone suggested that the celebrant him/herself can make a big difference. Some can convey that sense of awe and devotion at being able to preach the word of God and preside at the sacraments. It was also suggested that for a sinner to hear the words, 'This is my body/blood given for you' conveyed the deepest sense

of the presence of Christ. Another person reflected on the Church in Eastern Europe where it was the liturgy that kept the Christian faith alive during the repressive communist era.

'The Liturgy': What is it?

Liturgy, as you'll all know, is the work of the people. That is what it means. It is something that as God's people gathered as Christ's body in a particular place we do together. Are we participating in 'liturgy' if it is something that is being done **to** us, or of which we are simply passive observers?

The liturgy is the work of the people, but when we talk about The Liturgy quite often we mean the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper. But I want us to think more broadly about liturgy: liturgy and worship as set forms and actions that work together, words and actions that inform one another, which are set for particular times of day (Morning Prayer, Evening Worship etc) or for particular times in the Church's year (The Good Friday Liturgy, the Easter Liturgy), specific things that we carry on as we tell our story over and over again. They are words and drama, music and action, liturgical silence as well, to tell particular stories and to enable that fresh encounter.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus tell their particular story and through it they have fresh encounter with Christ whom they discover to be risen.

When we talk about liturgy we often talk about particular books, particular set forms, particular agreed sorts of worship. We're talking about things that have an ownership that is beyond the immediate. Liturgy is something that belongs to the Church. It doesn't belong to me or to you, it belongs to **us**. It belongs to the Church in different times and places and across the centuries.

In his book 'Naught for your Comfort' Trevor Huddlesdon reflected very movingly on the liturgy of Maundy Thursday. After the Mass has ended on Maundy Thursday in the catholic tradition the celebrant would wash the feet of the faithful and dry them with a towel and, Huddlesdon reflects, in that action the centuries are swept away and you are gathered with the disciples in the Upper Room on the first Maundy Thursday. And he went on to reflect that if the incarnation means anything at all it means that; it means God's identification with humankind 'in his utter littleness and poverty'. Liturgy that enters every time and place and doesn't belong to us is about a God who comes amongst us. And Christ sits with the disciples at the supper table in Emmaus and transforms them, sweeps away the centuries and takes us out of now and into eternity.

The Bishop that I work for always takes his watch off when he presides at the Eucharist. When somebody asked him why he did this (because one of the consequences of this is that he always leaves his watch in the vestry!) he said, 'Because when we celebrate the Eucharist we're not in Time, we're in Eternity. So I don't need my watch.'

The serious point is that as centuries are swept away and we identify then and now with the immediacy of Christ come among us in Jesus of Nazareth, so we are gathered out of our immediate context and into eternity. For those of you who know the Narnia stories of C S Lewis it's like when Lucy walks through the wardrobe into Narnia, time takes on a different quality.

When we think about liturgical worship we can be thinking about something very formal with a huge degree of ceremonial and people can get very possessive about it. You'll all know the joke about liturgists and terrorists? You can negotiate with one but not with the other! People can get very, very possessive about how liturgy should be done. But there's nothing intrinsic in liturgy that says it must be formal or complicated – nothing at all. We can have an informal liturgy, a very simple liturgy to mark the beginning of the new school year, for example. We can bless school bags and have three or four words of response. That is a liturgy. It is a set form that belongs to a particular time or place or occasion that transforms it and enables a different sort of encounter. It doesn't need to be complicated.

The Liturgy: then and now and when

So when we talk about liturgy we can be talking about a variety of different things, and it's meant a variety of different things over the centuries in different churches and contexts. We're not going to do the whole history of liturgy before we go to the cathedral, but one of the things we see in the very earliest churches is the development of set forms, right back to the first century and the Didache. Early liturgical documents tell us that these are set prayers to be used in set ways. And they are always used to tell a story and to enable an encounter.

Into the Early Middle Ages there was a huge development of particular types of liturgical book. Monk's libraries were filled with books giving the antiphons, anthems and responses for every day of the Church's year. They tell a story. They mark our time. Yesterday evening in the cathedral we heard Canon Kennedy talking about the importance of

Bede in marking time, giving us a language for our sacred time. And liturgy became part of how our time is made sacred.

In the Middle Ages the presence of Christ in the liturgy was primarily understood as being sacramental, in the Eucharist. And we know that in the Medieval West, particularly in England, on Maundy Thursday evening two hosts would be pre-sanctified for the next day. One would be used at the Good Friday liturgy which left the second consecrated host. And that would be buried in the Easter Sepulchre. It would be wrapped in a shroud, all would be dark. The presence of Christ had been buried. The presence of Christ in the Church was mainly understood to be in the sacrament. So when Christ was liturgically dead so too the host was buried. It would be resurrected again during the Liturgy of Easter Day.

When we come to the Reformation we see a variety of understandings as to what liturgy is about. We see a huge debate about what the Church should do for its worship, and how. What language should people worship in? There are arguments about whether you can do liturgically what is not in scripture. That leads to arguments about exactly what liturgical practices there are in scripture.

Most of my work looks at the Church of England so I'm going to reflect briefly on that for a moment and see what happens to Anglican liturgy in the Reformation. People usually think of the English Reformation as being about liturgy. They think of Cranmer and his Book of Common Prayer, and of what becomes intrinsic as to what becomes 'Anglican' as being about liturgy. And that is true. Eamon Duffy, the great historian of Catholic early modern England, wrote this at the end of his 'Stripping the Altars': 'Cranmer's sombrely magnificent prose read week by week entered and possessed their minds and became the fabric of their prayer, the utterance of their most vulnerable and solemn moments. And more astringent, strident words entered their minds and hearts too; the Book of Homilies and a thousand "no Popery" sermons, a relentless torrent carrying away the landmarks of a thousand years.'

In his book, 'The Stripping of the Altars', Eamon Duffy looked at liturgical transformation. He looked at how you went from a society that was sacralised, where there was so much liturgical ritual, to a society whose liturgy was simple, where liturgy in the reformation Church of England was much more word-based, having very little ritual, and the power of those words was protestantising England.

But there's something very curious about liturgy in Early Modern England, and that is that nobody uses the word! The word 'liturgy' is not there! We think of worship by the book according to the order of the Book of Common Prayer, but nobody at all talks about 'liturgy'. Richard Hooker doesn't talk about 'liturgy'; it is not a word that features because 'liturgy' had been part of that Catholic heritage that had been swept away. So even as people are arguing really profoundly, as they do from the 1560s onwards, about things like can you use a ring in marriage, can you use the sign of the cross at Baptism, and even should you have service with which to bury the dead? Even as people are talking deeply and animatedly about the very fabric of liturgy, how it should be done and what it should include, nobody uses the word. I don't think it appears again in English until quite a long way into the 17th century, to the 1620s at least.

People talk about the 'Uses' of the pre-reformation Church – the 'Use' of Salisbury or York – or the 'Order' of the Book of Common Prayer or the 'Order' that is used for the churches in Geneva that is translated into English. They talk about the 'Order' of the Scottish Prayer Book that is then known as 'Lord's Liturgy' and sets off a Civil War in 1637. When the Civil War comes in England the Book of Common Prayer is proscribed, it is abolished, and what replaces it is not an 'Order' at all, it is a set of instructions about how worship should be done. It tells you that the minister will say words 'like this' but not these words, he will do something 'like this' but not that he will do this! And what becomes extraordinary is the depth of the shaping of the English Church by the Prayer Book Liturgy. So when it said that the minister will say words 'like this' the minister in many cases simply recited the words from the Book of Common Prayer, so deeply had it shaped the culture and practice of English Protestantism.

When we look at the Prayer Book in the context of the proliferation of church 'orders' and practices across Protestant Europe we don't see it as something particularly unique or special; it is one 'order' among many, one answer among many about how scriptural, Protestant pure worship might be done. It was only because of Elizabeth the First's liturgical eccentricities that we are stuck, of gifted, with what we have. It might all have been so very different – we don't know.

So we are shaped by our liturgy, we're shaped by the words, the practices and the rituals that we use, weekly or day by day and that gives us what the 20th century novelist Rose Macauley refers to as 'spiritual capital'. She was brought up in a church-going family, very involved in the catholic tradition of the early 20th century. But she moved away from church and much later in life came back to her faith. As she reflected on that, as she does in her letters to her spiritual director, she said that the words and the practices she had known as a young woman gave her language to draw on. They gave her a way back in.

Liturgy as a way (back) in to encounter with Christ

You'll all be familiar with people who have worshipped week by week all through their lives and who have the language deep within them to express matters of ultimate concern. And this presents a challenge for us as we **do** liturgy because the more varied it is, the more we change it, the less we make it possible for it to inhabit us and for us to inhabit it. Now that's not an advertisement for no liturgical change, but it is a question and a challenge for those of us who think about liturgy and who lead liturgy. When we are doing it, what are we doing? How do we do it? And how do we make things both familiar and fresh?

The liturgy can provide a way back into encounter with Christ. It can give us language to borrow to help us speak of ultimate things. It can also give us a drama to enter into that can tell us something extraordinary. I have a friend (and I know he won't mind me using him as an example) who had been brought up kind-of church-going, singing in the choir and that sort of thing, and then went to read music at university. He had no interest at all in 'doing church' – he just liked church music. His experience of singing the various parts of the Holy Week liturgy re-converted him, helped him see what he'd lost. It was the drama, the music, the imagery, the words, the story that was being told, all playing together, that gave him a way into encounter.

And in that context liturgy is part of the Church's mission. It is the way we tell our story. I know that when Anna Norman Walker spoke to you before she reflected on cathedral worship which, between 2005 and 2015 in this country, has seen an average of 18% growth in cathedral attendance, which is not the more general pattern of church attendance in this country, I think it's fair to say. But what is extraordinary about that is that it applies both to the special events, carol services and things like that, and also the ordinary week on week services like mid-week Evensong. There is something about entering a special physical space, liturgical space out of our ordinary time, hearing words and music, seeing drama, seeing ritual which speaks into something culturally that we need.

It is interesting that in all the research that's done on 'millenials', people who are just about younger than me, one of the things that comes out over and over again is the importance that people place on things that seem solid and rooted, that we don't have to invent every time, that are something bigger than ourselves, that give us a story to enter into.

Just to come back to the supper at Emmaus – I love this painting by Diego Velázquez called 'Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus'. He painted it in 1617/18. The kitchen maid is working away and the supper is taking place in the adjacent room. And I wonder what this painting might tell us about liturgical encounter with the risen Christ. It can all be going on behind us; it can all be going on with us oblivious to it; or it can utterly transform our everyday. As she works, there is the risen Christ and her day might or might not be transformed. The way the light falls on her face leads me to think that the light of the risen Christ made known in bread as he sits with his friends is spilling over onto her cheek.



Liturgy is not just what happens when we're in the wardrobe, to return to Narnia for a moment. When Lucy comes out of the wardrobe, everything she encounters is the same, but she is different. The kitchen maid is illuminated with the light of the risen Christ. She is made different, her everyday made holy.

'As we prepare to meet Christ in Word and Sacrament...'

And so we prepare to meet Christ in Word and Sacrament – but we shall have our coffee first! So I want us to reflect very briefly on the shape of the Eucharistic Liturgy as it exists in modern Anglican and Catholic shape, and as we shall encounter it when we go into Durham Cathedral. What are the ingredients? Where is the risen Christ?

Well, first there is *The Greeting* - The Lord be with you. It is not just holy 'good morning' it is saying *the Lord* be with you. We see the image of Christ in one another and we trust that he is present in our gathering. And so in Eastertide we don't say 'The Lord be with you', we say 'Alleluia! Christ is risen!' and thus we affirm that he is.

But then we acknowledge the ways in which we've separated ourselves – we haven't noticed the risen Christ in our midst, and we haven't seen the presence of Christ in one another. And as we come to our *Prayers of Penitence* we encounter Christ, both King and Healer, just as Mary Magdalene encountered him in the garden

on the first Easter Day, and Pater did on the beach when Jesus asked him, 'Do you love me?' We are drawn back in to the Christ we have not noticed, and we know, as Mary and Peter did, that we *are forgiven*.

Then we meet Christ in the *Liturgy of the Word*. 'Were not our hearts burning within us as he talked to us on the road?' says the disciple at the Emmaus supper. We read and interpret scripture together, we tell the story together of what God in Christ has done, and we tell the story of what Christ has done and is doing in our world today, and we bring the needs of the world to him.

Then we share *The Peace* – 'And the risen Christ came and stood among his disciples and said, "Peace be with you!", and they were glad when they saw it was the Lord.'

Next comes the *Liturgy of the Sacrament*, and we meet him in bread and wine, as did those disciples at Emmaus. But then we're *Sent out*... We're sent out to tell what has happened in the breaking of the bread. In one version of the Post-Communion Prayer we say, 'We who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; and we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.' The light of Christ sharing supper with his friends spills over into our everyday world.

Conclusion and a Question

So where do we find the risen Christ in our liturgy? In the new light in the darkness at Easter; in the new life in the water of baptism; in words of hope and consolation at the graveside; in the bread and wine as at the supper table at Emmaus on the first Easter day.

But it's not straightforward. It's not uncontested what we should do; it's not uncontested how we should do it. The challenge is to find liturgy that helps people to encounter Christ, that invites Christ into where we are, that speaks both of the here and now and of the eternal; that is 'apt' for its context, and is accessible without being patronising.

I don't know if you've come across the work of Sharon Moughtin-Mumby in Southwark Diocese of the Church of England, and her 'Diddy Disciples' and the idea that even with very small children we can invite them in to liturgical formation, and a profound encounter – and we don't need to baby them.

'How do we make fresh what is thought to be familiar, so familiar that it doesn't need to be thought about?' (Rowan Williams, *The Lion's World. A Journey into the heart of Narnia* SPCK 2012, p. 19). We hear the words in Aramaic or in a language that we're not used to, or a ritual done differently – and it's all new. How do we keep encountering, and helping others to encounter, the risen Christ alive in our liturgy as well as in the rest of our lives?