

I was at a workshop a few years ago when the current Archbishop of York, Steven Cottrell, asked a fascinating question. The question was this: what were the first words Jesus spoke after his resurrection? I'm not going to ask anyone to say it out loud, but just take a moment to ponder what your answer would be to that question...what were the first words Jesus spoke after his resurrection? I'll give you a hint...it's not "It's me!!" or "I'm back!!" which would be what I could imagine myself wanting to say in the same circumstances.

It's a bit of a trick question actually, because of course, the answer depends on which Gospel you read. But I find all of them fascinating.

Mark's Gospel has no resurrection appearance at all if you accept, as I do, that the most reliable sources end Mark's gospel with the disciples scattering in fear at the sight of the empty tomb. Matthew has Jesus' first words to the two Marys who came to his tomb as 'Greetings! Do not be afraid' and then asking the women to go and announce his resurrection to his brothers.

In John's Gospel, Jesus' first words are spoken to Mary Magdalene "Woman, why are you weeping?" In Luke's Gospel his first words are in this passage that we have heard this morning, the 'Emmaus Road' story: "What are you discussing with each other as you walk along?" I love both of these 'first words' from John and Luke because they are questions. As Bishop Steven said, if it were any of us who had come back from the dead and were seeing our beloved friends again, we might be more likely to start talking about ourselves – telling the story of what we'd been through, and what it was like harrowing hell.

But instead, in one of the stories Jesus asks his beloved friend "why are you weeping?" and in the other one Jesus asks some different friends "what are you talking about together? What's preoccupying you?"

What would you say this morning if the risen Jesus asked you the same questions – *why are you weeping* (or...*what is upsetting you today?*) and *what's on your mind?* Do you ever wonder if Jesus wants to know? Have you ever thought of assuming that he does, and telling him? These first words of the risen Christ tell us something very important about who Jesus wants to continue to be for us and with us.

The risen Jesus cares about what's going on in our lives...what's disturbing our peace, what's exciting us, what's troubling in the world, what we're hoping and planning, what's new, what are the topics that keep coming up when we meet with our friends.

Only when Jesus has heard from his two companions what their story is, when they've shared their sadness and confusion about the death of Jesus of Nazareth – what they'd hoped he'd be, and then the failure of those hopes – and their sheer bewilderment of the missing body and the vision of angels – only then does he share with them from the scriptures, and teach them how to make sense of his death and resurrection.

This is an important example and model for us to reflect on. These first words of Jesus don't just tell us about who Jesus wants to be for us, they also tell us something about the kinds of people we Christians are called to be for others.

We all have friends who want to talk more than they listen. But Jesus' relationship to his friends is one where he adopts a posture of listening first, to what is uppermost in their hearts and minds. Only then does he bring himself into the conversation and share with them what they want and need to hear.

As the Church, we really want to share our story of Easter with those who will find it life-giving. We have a wonderful message of resurrection, of new beginnings, of love conquering even death. But often Christians come alongside people and just tell the same story over and over, without ever asking the questions: 'What is it that you care about? What's bothering you? What are you wrestling with because it really matters? Where in your life is there grief?' These are questions that require relationship. And they require us to listen at depth, without just waiting to give our pre-prepared answer.

Does the Risen Christ have anything to say to a world struggling in the late stages of a viral pandemic, with climate collapse, war and anxiety about our children's futures? Absolutely. Is there anything in the Christian faith that can respond to this moment we are in, with all its turmoil and uncertainty and loss – both actual and feared? Absolutely. Can we put those things on a billboard? No, no we can't. Can we expect people to walk into our church services to hear those things? Perhaps several decades ago that may have been the case, but it's really unlikely in this day and age.

But everywhere, in conversation, in online dialogues, over the phone and around meal tables, there are opportunities for us to ask others: 'why are you weeping?' and 'what are you talking about as you walk along?' And to really listen to the answer. And to sit with and ponder what people are actually saying, not just what we think they might say. To share our own struggles, our own preoccupations. And, if it seems right to do so, to share with them what we have found to offer us hope and a light for our path as we walk a difficult way.

As people of faith we need to stop talking just to each other about the hope we have in Christ, as though we have no confidence that this is a hope for the whole world. But we need to listen first for the ache that cries out for relief. Jesus has modelled for us what that looks like. May we go and do likewise.

After the sermon:

In the silence: imagine Jesus coming and sitting down next to you this morning. He asks you: what are you thinking about? What's troubling you today? Take some time in the silence to unburden your heart to Jesus, sharing with him whatever is most preoccupying or concerning you at the moment.

When you've finished, ask God whether there's someone in your life that needs to be asked that same question. Is there a person who needs a listening ear to tell their story of what's happening for them at the moment? Perhaps make a mental note to get in touch with them across the coming week.