

# Covid19 Enduring Lent or Promise of Pentecost for the Church

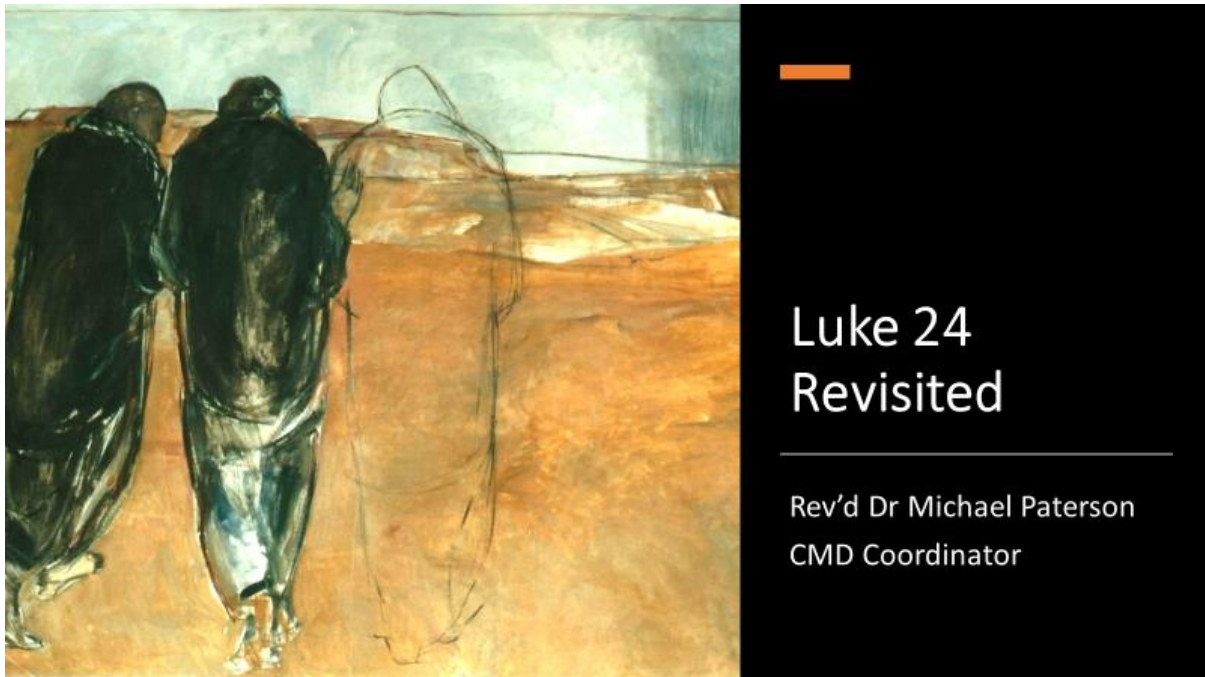
## Diocese of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane

### CMD Conference 29 May 2020

---

The conference reflected on Luke 24, Jesus on the Road to Emmaus.

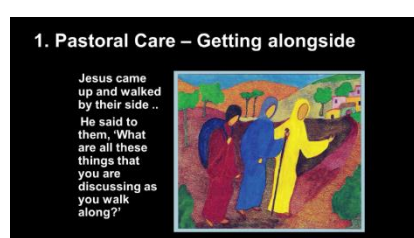
Here is the text of the presentation by Rev Dr Michael Paterson which is offered in trust for the exclusive use of the Diocese. Please **do not** disseminate further.



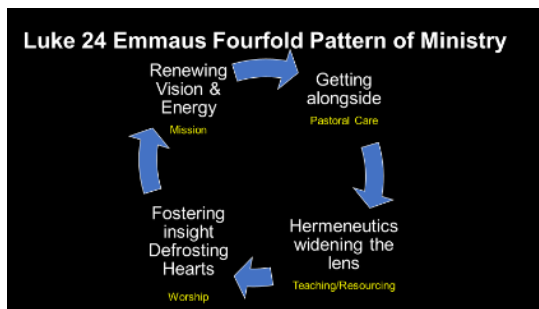
This morning what I would like to do is engage with this beautiful gospel story  
In a way that invites us to bring the original story of Jesus on the Road to Emmaus  
Into dialogue with the various voices I have been hearing during lockdown  
Both within the diocese and in my work with church and organisational leaders  
across the English speaking world.

For me Luke 24 is the fullest expression of ministry that we can find in the New Testament

The story unfolds in four moments



The first is pastoral Care when Jesus gets alongside the disciples



The second is Hermeneutics that moment when Jesus says there's another way of understanding what is going on

The third moment happens at the Inn when Jesus breaks the bread and their eyes are opened

And the fourth moment – the climax of the whole story – is when the disciples return to Jerusalem with the new vision and energy of missionaries.

And what I love about the story is that each of those four moments offers an **assurance** and an **invitation**.

Pastoral care offers the assurance that Jesus walks with us and issues the Invitation for us to come alongside others

Hermeneutics offers the assurance that life is meaningful and invites us to help others make sense of experience

The third moment, the moment of Worship offers the assurance of Christ's abiding presence in the breaking of bread and invites us to engage in a wide ranging of eye opening, heart-defrosting activities.

And finally, Mission offers the assurance of renewal and vision and issues an invitation that we would do what it takes to awaken energy and hope in others

Taken as a whole

the Emmaus Road story maps a process

which begins in tragedy but ends in transformation.

So lets look more closely at each moment in turn within that process

Jesus came up and walked by their side

The first thing I notice about this extraordinary story is that the whole thing is opportunistic

Jesus hadn't made an appointment to meet these folk

It wasn't in anyone's diary

Nor does it happen in church, Temple or synagogue

Jesus doesn't call the disciples over to him

'Oi, you, yes you with the long faces,  
come over here,

I'm the answer to your questions,  
I'm the one you are looking for'

Rather he joins them

He sidles alongside them

he makes the first move

and joins them where they are

- not where they should be

but where they are -

on the road

running away from a traumatic experience

in which they saw everything that gave them meaning and purpose

stripped away from them

They hadn't lost hope the way you and I lose things around the house.

These guys have watched their hope being brutally

and intentionally murdered

That's why their faces are downcast.

That's why they are walking away from the Holy City.

That's why their brains are frazzled and they can't think straight.

They are in crisis.

And along comes someone who doesn't seem to have a clue what has been going on.

They must have wondered what rock has Jesus been hiding under?

But Jesus persists

'tell me your story' - Tell me more Exhaust your story yep Every last ounce of it



And so begins that saddest of litanies

We had hoped ..

We had hoped that he was the Messiah

We had hoped that he would be the one to save Israel

We had hoped ... a litany that has echoed down through the centuries

Fast forward to May 2020

and the litany continues

'We had hoped we would get away with 20,000 deaths in the UK not nearly 40,0000'

'We had hoped the lockdown would be over by now'

'We had hoped we could hug our families by now'

We had hoped we could have kept our jobs'

Sat our O levels

Got to my mum's funeral

Shaken off this chest infection

We had hoped

The truest prayer many of us will have made in these days

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus

We are each living through a crisis of meaning and purpose for our world



Some have turned it into a **gym**

- They have never been fitter
- Baked more
- Taken up more hobbies

- Had the garden in better shape
- Enjoyed more time with the family
- Read, knitted, prepared material for their advent study group

While others have experienced it as a **jail**

Locked down or locked in

With a partner they don't love

Locked in by depression and all that comes from isolation

Locked down by the loss of a job,

the loss of health, the loss of confidence

And others again – myself included - have oscillated

between gym and jail

sometimes from hour to hour

Minute to minute

And so while some can't wait for lockdown to be lifted

Others are terrified it may come too soon

But what about you?

Who has your congregation walked with during lockdown?

Who have you been actively joining on the road

– not who have you invited to join you on Church Street

or on online worship

But who have **you joined**?

And what litanies of disappointment have you been hearing?

What litanies of hope have you caught hold of?

And when this is all over

who will your congregation choose to walk the extra mile with

who three months ago were strangers to you?

What always touches me about this story is that

on the road to Emmaus – Jesus makes the disciples centre stage

– not himself

He gets **them** to do the talking

While **he** does the listening

He focuses on them

He doesn't point to himself

And I wonder how that matches up with how I minister and how you minister?

The second moment in the story is really striking and only comes once the disciples have exhausted telling their sorry tale.

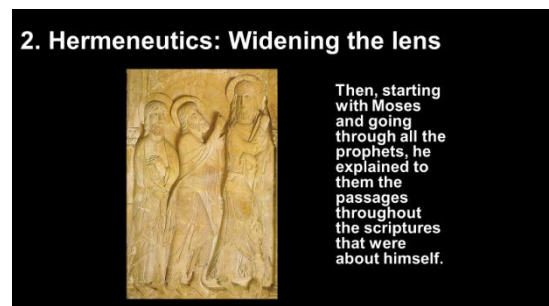
Until now Jesus has got them to do all the talking

And being a 7 mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus we can guess that much of the 2 and half hours it would take has been given over to listening

But now Jesus calls them foolish

'you foolish disciples. So slow to believe all that the prophets have taught us'

And starting with Moses he opens the scriptures to them.



Wow – it takes guts to call your people foolish especially if you want them to like you!

And it takes guts to keep listening to someone who tells you, you are a fool

It seems to me that what is happening here in this second moment

is that Jesus has listened so well to the disciples

and has really left them with a deep sense of being heard and understood and taken seriously

that he has earned the place to say

'Howsabout we look at your version of events through a different lens?'

Howsabout we place that wee story within a much bigger story

Howsabout we place what you are experiencing right now within a much longer history

Howasbout we take your dislocating trauma with all the questions it raises in your minds

and relocate it within the old, old, old wisdom stories you have known since the cradle

That's what I think is happening here

Jesus is putting the disciples back in touch with communal knowledge

He is not conjuring up some flashy new thing

not downloading some new programme

or introduce some shiny novel insight

but simply helping people

whose trauma has dislodged their usual meaning making stories

to re-connect with their old, old, old wisdoms

not meet it for the first time

but reconnect with the deep truths than get eclipsed by traumatic experience.

So if the assurance of the second hallmark of ministry is that God can help us make sense of our stories within the Divine story

I think the second invitation of Luke 24 is all about how we as ministers learn to become tour guides, pointing out where God already is

The lens we look through will determine what we see.



This is the whole area of Hermeneutics

Of interpreting the signs of the times.

Of speaking of God in the world

And speaking of the world with God

In the less liturgically prescribed denominations,

interpreting the world within the story of God

happens often in the prayers, images, songs and tailor made services that many of our reformed colleagues write from scratch week by week

but for us Piskies,

who promise our bishop at ordination or licensing

that we will only use liturgies that have been authorised by Canon

then hermeneutics can be rather pressurised into the weekly sermon  
with the occasional breakout attempt in the church magazine  
or pastoral letter

but the problem is that those approaches only reach our own  
those who already take part or belong in some way  
those who do churchy things in churchy buildings with churchy people

but picking up on the example of Jesus on the Emmaus Road

I am challenged to ask

who are we conversing with opportunistically?

And how are we speaking not only to the certain but to the searcher?



One of the great blessing of lockdown  
has been that people  
some of whom we don't even know  
have joined us for online worship

It's great that they have joined us

But I wonder – will we - Emmaus Road style –

join **them** when this is all over

or will we expect them to join us –

do things our way?,

interpret the world the way we do?

Or will we take our cue from Jesus

and join them on the road

and ask them how they find meaning

make sense of things

interpret life?





What I am asking folks is ‘who gets to do the hermeneutics’?  
because during Lockdown  
the hermeneutics offered by Instagram and Twitter, bby TED talks and Facebook  
have been much stronger and clearer and publicly discussed  
than the hermeneutics of the Christian churches.

Which prompts me to ask, when will the churches catch on  
that without dumbing down the gospel  
right now,  
the power of a well chosen image  
a provocative one liner  
a comment which takes the reality we are living through seriously  
AND also manages to offer hope or makes you smile  
is more likely to be remembered  
than a perfectly crafted sermon



And so I ask  
how did your church engage hermeneutically before lockdown?  
How did it speak to the village or town or the market square?

And then during lockdown,  
how has your church been interpreting the signs of the times

And how, when we are all released  
might your church engage in meaning making  
not only with those who already come through our doors  
or even with the new friends we have met online  
but also with those who walk or drive past your buildings?  
What podcasts or online discussion groups will we initiate?  
What messages will we broadcast from your church railings or our notice boards to  
whom language like 1662, BCP or 1982 means nothing?  
I know two ministers in Scotland  
who have been approached for adult baptism during lockdown  
by people who found the messages of hope  
pinned to the local church railings made them think.  
And in both cases  
neither had ever set foot in the door of the church  
or knew any of the congregation.

The world wide web has thrown hermeneutics wide open.  
Wouldn't it be tragic  
if the Christian church had nothing to say  
or worse still only said things  
that no one had any interest in hearing?

### 3. Fostering Insight, Defrosting Hearts

Jesus made as if to go on but they pressed him 'Stay with us'.  
While he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him ..



The third moment in the Emmaus story is perhaps the best known of all  
and focuses on the breaking of the bread  
but there are a few subtleties which I want to highlight this morning.

The first is that the breaking of the bread happens in response to an invitation which you could easily miss.

The text says

**‘And when they came to the Inn, Jesus made as if to go on but they said Stay’**  
– don’t move – stay, we want more of you’

and therein lies one of the deepest lessons for pastors and leaders of all time.

Jesus models for us how to be a guest.

He does not presume to be welcome

He waits to be invited

and only when invited does the miracle happen.

Forgive me folks,

but I think the days of the Church playing Mine Host are over.

And the sooner we learn that we are guests in people’s lives the better.

That certainly has been the greatest lesson of my life as a priest

that I have no right to be there

that I have no right to gatecrash the deepest intimacies of people’s. lives

their -births, their marriages, their deaths

their Sicknesses, their guilty secrets, their worries, their messy relationships

In my reading of Luke 24, Jesus earns the invitation to be a guest

precisely because he has walked the hard miles with the disciples

taking them seriously

validating their experience

and offering an alternative take on what they have been through

all of which somehow scratched where they itched

The Orkney poet, George Mackay Brown captures this beautifully when he writes



a prodigal hospitality  
which sets no entrance exams  
is audaciously placed  
at the heart of the divine nature

Prodigal hospitality

Radical hospitality

The kind of mutual hospitality in which the roles of guest and host are reciprocal

And that's why, the very Jesus who earlier called the disciples 'fools'  
is the same Jesus whose company they want more of'

'Its getting dark

Come

Stay

Be with us

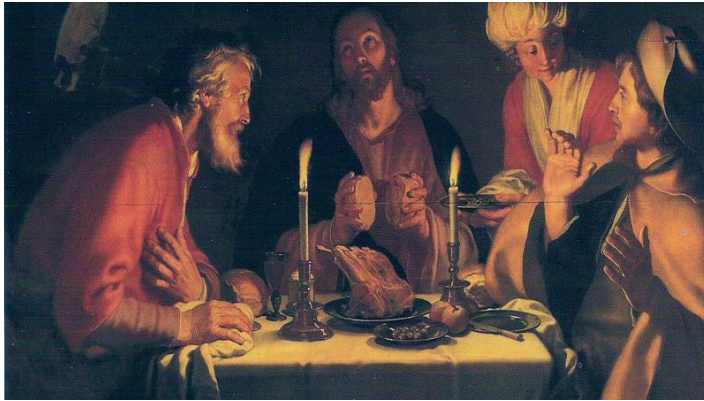
Share with us

Eat with us

Rest with us

And then – and only then, at their invitation  
as a guest in their lives  
does Jesus become the host  
breaking the bread  
in a story which has gone down in history.

And just as Jesus walked alongside them without pointing to himself  
so now that he has broken the bread  
he disappears from their sight  
because his work is done.



The other subtlety I want to highlight about this passage is that it all happens in the dark

‘Stay with us for it is evening and the day is far spent.’

The opening of eyes happens in the dark

The warming of hearts happens in the dark

The breaking of bread happens in the dark

The recognition of Jesus’ identity happens in the dark

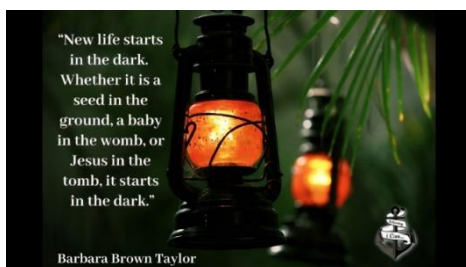
And the return to Jerusalem

of two disciples who had left the Holy city traumatised

and had already walked a good 2 and a half journey

all happens in dark

Barbara Brown Taylor picks up the theme beautifully



New life starts in the dark.

Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb

or Jesus in the tomb,

it all starts in the dark.

#### 4. Renewing Energy & Vision



And they set out  
that instant and  
returned to  
Jerusalem ...  
And told their story  
of what had  
happened on the  
road and how they  
recognised him at  
the breaking of the  
bread

Which leads me to wonder, what new eucharistic communities have been emerging in the dark of Covid?

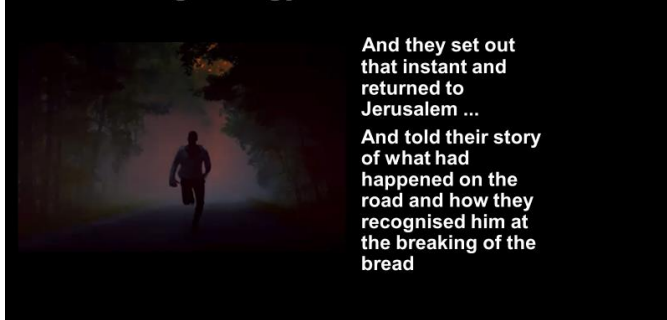
What spiritual adventures have we been offering people

which have the capacity to open closed eyes,  
and warm cold or grief stricken hearts.

And I wonder what deeply simple things  
like hospitality – and the sharing of food –  
are we willing to re-claim and intentionally use  
to gather folks around the kinds of tables at which  
you wouldn't be able to work out who is the host and who is the guest?

And I wonder how your congregation did that *pre-lockdown*  
I wonder how you have been doing that *during* lockdown?  
And I wonder how you might approach that *post* lockdown?

#### 4. Renewing Energy & Vision



And they set out  
that instant and  
returned to  
Jerusalem ...  
And told their story  
of what had  
happened on the  
road and how they  
recognised him at  
the breaking of the  
bread

For me the whole climax of Luke 24  
is this 4<sup>th</sup> moment

when the disciples  
set out that instant  
to run back to Jerusalem.

the inn? Because it was dark

When did he break the bread? While it was dark

When did the traumatised disciples become missionaries

While it was dark

The very disciples who had trudged away from the Holy City

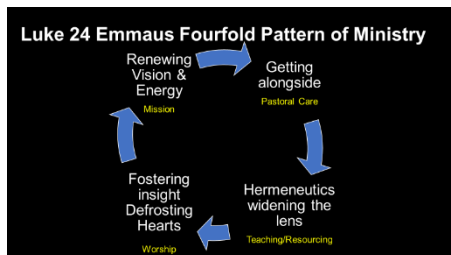
Now rush back

Without delay

Think about it. Why were they in

No long traumatised But transformed  
 No longer grumping But gossiping  
 No longer miserable but missionaries of a gospel  
 that was far too urgent to wait until daylight

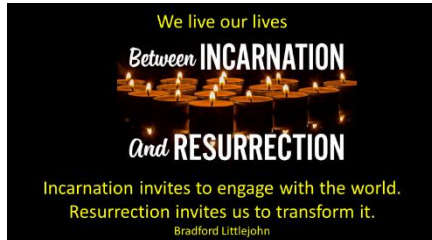
And so the story begins all over again



as the dejected become the pastoral carers  
 coming alongside folk they meet on the road  
 as the bewildered help others find meaning in their experiences  
 as those who issued the invitation to table

now reciprocally engage in forms of hospitality that opens eyes and revivifies hearts  
 and which culminate in recovery of vision and energy all over again.

Covid 19 has reinforced a point Bishop Ian brought to our attention in his very first clergy conference two years ago which was this:



We live our lives between Incarnation and Resurrection.

Incarnation invites us to engaged with the world.

Resurrection invites us to transform it.

During lockdown,

many of us have rolled up their sleeves and engaged with the world

In all sorts of life giving ways

Incarnation. Presence. Action. Engagement have been our mottos

but what about Resurrection? and transforming the world?

not resetting the clocks

not going back to business as normal

or retreating behind our closed doors once lockdown is over

to once again do our churchy thing with churchy people?

We live our lives between Incarnation and Resurrection

Sure

But we also live our lives in the dynamic of Pentecost  
An unprecedented moment in the life of God's people

Not a date in the diary  
but a continuously unfolding event  
which assures us that however inadequate we feel for the task  
God's spirit will more than make up for it  
Since God's offer is a spirit of power and not of timidity  
A spirit of agility not a spirit of 'same old same old'  
A spirit of audacity not of risk aversion.

And then on Holy Thursday this year,  
Bishop Ian in his charge to us cited Wendel Berry's plea  
that we would PRACTICE RESURRECTION

In closing, I take up that plea  
And suggest that

**The Church practices Resurrection & keep the flame of Pentecost burning when we**

1. **ACCOMPANY** – join people on the road
2. **ENLARGE THE PICTURE** – widen the lens of understanding & offer other ways of looking at things
3. **FOSTER INSIGHT** – help eyes to open, insight to be found, hearts to defrost
4. **RENEW ENERGY & VISION** – enable people to find and spread hope & purpose

the Church of God practices resurrection AND makes Pentecost a reality when we

Accompany

Enlarge the picture

Foster insight

And renew energy and vision.

Some denominations major on one of those 4 hallmarks of ministry.  
Some of us here today may be drawn to one more than another.  
But the challenge I welcome is that  
None of us was ordained or licensed to follow our own preferences  
or to do our own thing.



However we come out of lockdown

we do so as Piskies and not as the post denominational church down the road.

And so I wonder, if we are actually called as ministers of the diocese

To ensure that all 4 hallmarks of ministry

Pastoral care – Hermeneutics - Eye opening worship and missional renewal

Are not preferences for those who like that kind of thing

But core facets of our calling.

### Questions for Reflection

<b>Pre-lockdown</b> How <i>did</i> ...	<b>During lockdown</b> How <i>is</i> ... your congregation	<b>Post lockdown</b> How <i>could</i> ...
1. join people on the road?		<b>Getting alongside</b>
2. widen the lens of understanding and offer a different take on what passes for reality?		<b>Hermeneutics &amp; Resourcing</b> <b>Interpreting the signs of the times</b>
3. engage in ways that have the power to open people's eyes & warm their hearts?		<b>Worship</b> <b>Art – music – imagination</b> <b>Connecting with communal story</b>
4. draw others into life changing patterns of being, doing and regeneration?		<b>Renewing energy</b> <b>Vision &amp; Mission</b>