

The Anglican Church has an official name for every Sunday of the year. In my younger clergy days, my senior colleagues had a non-official name for the first Sunday after Easter. Low Sunday. After the attendance highs of Easter Sunday, the pews significantly empty the following Sunday. Low Sunday always a puzzle to me. Surely Christians will be on fire after celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. For nothing can ever be the same again. Low Sunday has a long history. The day of Jesus' resurrection the first Low Sunday. Captured in the disposition and thinking of two people walking to Emmaus. Heading home from Jerusalem after the dramatic events of the previous few days. The two people probably husband and wife, Cleopas and Mary. According to John's gospel, one of four women standing near the cross is Mary, wife of Clopas. Luke's narrative makes clear the couple are downcast, angry, disillusioned, confused. Shattered the one they thought could be the Messiah, now dead and buried. No thought of resurrection. Trying to comprehend what is happening. Processing the empty tomb and angelic message. Cleopas and Mary reveal inner turmoil, confusion in response to the stranger's question. **v19-24** Their experience shaking faith and confidence. You know how the story unfolds. Transformation captured in **v32**, "*Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*" Easter disillusionment replaced by Easter fire. Hearts burning with passion. The stranger: the risen Lord Jesus. During the week I visited three of our housebound saints. Easter fire in their eyes. Easter fire from their lips. What about you, brothers and sisters? Last Sunday we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus. Are your hearts on fire? Easter fire gripping you and shaping your response to the risen Lord and to his world. Has the fire of seven days ago been replaced by dying embers? Doused by the drudgery of life: disappointments, things not going according to plan, tiredness, stress, anxiety, consequences of unwise decisions, rebelliousness against a God who demands your all but seems to deliver so little. No Easter fire; the spiritual equivalent of Coffs Harbour holiday traffic. Little movement. Luke's account offers four insights into understanding a lack of Easter fire. **First**, faith shaped primarily by experience will be roller coaster faith. Up and down, twisting and turning. Cleopas and Mary on the roller coaster. Anticipating Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. Convinced by their experience of his miracles and teaching. Faith smashed as experience fails to meet expectations. A defeated, crucified Messiah. Dead and buried. You see their experience inadequate in

understanding the truth; of seeing the bigger picture. An ill-equipped tour guide to the promises of God. The struggling, disillusioned, confused couple not gently encouraged by their walking companion. Their King, the risen Lord Jesus, rebukes them. *He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"* **v25-26** Be sure a rebuke from Jesus is like a flashing warning light. Spiritual danger, spiritual danger. The danger here: failure to believe the word of God. Failure to assess their experiential conclusions by the searching light of God's word. If they had believed God's word they would have known about the suffering Messiah, numbered with transgressors. Despised and rejected. Beaten, disfigured. But not abandoned to death and decay. Sisters and brothers, we stand under Jesus' rebuke if experience, not the word of God has the final say. As Christians we have the privilege of knowing Jesus personally. We experience his love, know his presence, enjoy his peace. Experiencing God, a great gift from God. But experience is a lousy master. Distorted by sinful perceptions and expectations. Our experiences require an interpreter. An anchor preventing us from being blown away, tossed about and damaged by the capricious wind that is human experience. That anchor revealed in our **second** insight. The word of God reveals the person and work of Jesus. Revelation on the road to Emmaus comes when the Scriptures are opened. Jesus didn't discuss their experiences and feelings about the events of recent days. He led them in a systematic Bible study. The word of God incarnate explaining the written word of God for the purpose of revealing himself. *'And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.'* **v27** Jesus still reveals himself through his word by his Spirit. On Anzac Day a young man approached me asking for a Bible. Wanting to understand Jesus. Without realizing it, he understood the significance of Jesus' actions here. Do you? You cannot truly know Jesus apart from his word. When our daughter was battling anorexia Leone and I pleaded with her to eat. Watching her starve herself deeply painful. I find it painful to watch Christians starve themselves spiritually. My plea today is don't. By refusal or neglect don't starve your soul by failing to regularly read the Bible. Brothers and sisters, how do you prepare to hear God's word? Do you prepare at all? When do you set time aside in your daily calendar to prayerfully, deliberately, reflectively read God's word? God is sovereign and powerful. Able to reveal Jesus any way he chooses. Testimonies abound of Muslims coming to faith in Jesus through dreams

and visions. But the reality of their conversion seen in a thirst for the word of God. A desire to know more clearly the one who made himself known. The word of God alone makes this possible. **Third**, God opens spiritual eyes in his time so people recognise Jesus. Cleopas and Mary did not recognise Jesus even as he walked and talked with them. God kept their eyes closed. *'but they were kept from recognizing him.'* **v16** Maybe so understanding shaped by Scripture not experience. Recognition of Jesus comes after he opened the Scriptures to them. *'Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.'* **v31** Sisters and brothers, is your heart's desire to know Jesus more deeply? Pray the words of Paul. *'I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,'* **Ephesians 1:17-18**

Do you want others to know Jesus? Pray the same prayer for them. **Fourth**, Easter fire leads to resurrection witness. After Jesus revealed himself to the dispirited couple they are on fire. Easter fire. Now passionate witnesses to his resurrection. O for such passionate witnesses in God's church today. Brothers and sisters, are you still searching for an experience to set your heart on fire? Stop searching. You need search no more. The risen Lord Jesus is here. Personally meeting you in his word, where you are. Are you burnt out, dry and hardened? Gave up searching years ago because you didn't find what you were looking for. Resume the search. You were looking in the wrong place. Come to his word. Easter fire is stoked by the fuel that is God's word. Meet with him. Allow him to bring you back to life. Low Sunday becomes resurrection Sunday as people recognise Jesus and hearts are set on fire. May each Sunday be resurrection Sunday. For Christ is risen. Alleluia.