



'Let your Holy Spirit blow over the earth, like the power of the storm; break into our lives, like blood into our veins and bring us to life like the energy of the sun.'

Prayer of a Ghanaian Christian

9th September 2026

Dear friends,

You may be aware that the celebrated American poet, Wendell Berry, died recently. He was a farmer but also a fearless campaigner against consumerism and systems which dehumanise life, who called us to honour the earth and live with love, humility and mystery. He ends one of his most famous poems, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*, by suggesting that above all, we should, 'Practice resurrection.'

Over the past year during my time in the presidency, the Vice President, Matt Forsyth, and myself developed a theme which we entitled, *Our Story, Our Song*. It had many strands to it but one element which seems to me important within the theme is the idea that we need to be liberated from stories which seem irredeemable and which prevent us from taking a step into the next page or chapter of the story.

I was struck recently whilst re-reading the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, how at one point they seem to be rooted to the spot unable to move: 'They stood still, looking sad,' (Luke 24:17). They are lost in the brokenness and darkness of all that has happened in the preceding days, wondering how to orientate themselves for the journey ahead, even whilst they have heard rumours of a different future. Emmaus is, at least at the beginning of the journey, a story about rupture, darkness and loss or at least about how we stand and emerge from these things. It's our story too, whether our story is one of concern about the future of our church community, a deep personal sense of loss or anxiety, or a deep rupture in a community, as we've witnessed in Middlesbrough in recent weeks. Yet, as Wendell Berry encourages us to think, when we wonder what resurrection might look like, we are invited to practice it.

How does that happen? The first thing I notice is that Jesus does not ignore the reality of their loss or the darkness that they experience. Jesus is present to, in and alongside the darkness. He stays with them. He walks with them. Darkness comes before the light; tears before renewal.

But as he walks with them, another stage of the journey begins to unfold: he engages with them. He begins to loosen within them the sense that this is the end of the story. He does not force himself upon them but as one stage of the journey seems to be coming to a close, he awaits their permission before entering into their home where he shares with them in the breaking of bread. Something changes: the door to the new is opened not cautiously but decisively. The door to the future that seemed closed is incapable of closing ever again. As one writer, Michael Paterson, puts it, '...death is undone, not negotiated with.'

I wonder whether as a district we are being called to a deepening of our vocation by becoming 'practitioners of resurrection.' This means inhabiting the brokenness, whatever that might look like for us, and refusing to accept that it marks the end of the story. What is pointed towards in the journey to

Emmaus is another page to turn, another chapter that needs writing. And Jesus stands at the threshold waiting to call us forth.

What he promises is freedom from stories which hold us in their grip and deny our true humanity. He liberates us from dead identities which we need to leave behind, which suffocate us and prevent us from stepping forward. The changes may seem unspectacular. But they are in fact everything because they offer a new way forward, a new beginning, a new way of looking at the world.

This is practising resurrection.

Peace and light,

Richard

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