

EAST GIPPSLAND EASTER REFLECTIONS 06

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A REFLECTION ON LUKE 24:13-35 – THE UNRECOGNISED CHRIST

It's been a heavy time lately, and this week I found that my soul had had enough of heavy crises and just wanted to play a bit. As a result I'm offering you a reflection focussing on my face mask. I brought this face mask with me from Brunswick to Bairnsdale on the off chance that I might need it – I was thinking there might be some residual smoke haze – little did I know that before long life was going to be all about face masks for a very different reason.



This genuine Chinese facemask was given to me as a gift by my sister who purchased it from a market in China. It has glow in the dark Chinese characters emblazoned upon it which say, "tonight we eat chicken".

Our gospel reading culminates in a shared meal – something we can't do outside of our household groups right now. It's not a chicken dinner in the gospel of Luke, but there in the taking, blessing, breaking and sharing of bread, the disciples suddenly realise that Christ is with them.

I miss shared meals with friends and family and my church community – those opportunities to break bread together and to know the presence of Christ in our sharing. Given that we can't share meals beyond our households, where now is Christ revealed to us?

When my sister gave me this mask, she told me that everywhere they went in China there were all kinds of different clothing items (t-shirts, jackets, hats, facemasks) with this same phrase printed on them, "tonight we eat chicken". What she couldn't explain to me was why the Chinese are all eating chicken tonight. After consulting Google, I can now report to you that the phrase refers to a computer game. Now I'm not a computer gamer myself – perhaps you aren't either and like me, haven't heard of the most popular online computer game in the world, PUBG, PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds. You and I may not have heard of it, but apparently 18 million people play this game with each other world-wide, and half of them are in China. The game pits 100 players at a time against each other in a battle, and when, in the end one player remains standing, the game announces the victor with the immortal words: "winner winner chicken dinner!" – a phrase which in the Chinese version of the game translates to: "Luck be with you, tonight we eat chicken." PUBG has spawned a genre of similar games which in English are called Battle Royale games, but in China are known as "chicken eating games".



I find it cute and amusing that I have ended up owning this (now very useful) fashion accessory which connects me to a subculture of which I otherwise have no knowledge or interest. 18 million people connected by a game.

There are many, many more people than that in the world connected in another way. Around 2 billion people are remotely connected with one another by the spirit of the living Christ – the many members of the one body of Christ united by his love across all the barriers that otherwise divide them: distance, language, culture, theology, race, gender, socioeconomic status. In the gospel story, when the two disciples recognise Jesus in the breaking of the bread at Emmaus, immediately he disappears from their sight and they are left with burning hearts. Similarly, we are connected to Christ, to one another, and to all his people in the world, by the fire of faith in our hearts, not by a presence that we can see and touch.

How do you feel about that? In this time of great separation, is it enough to know the connection of faith? There is normally so much more that nourishes connection in our faith, not least shared meals. But we always have that heart connection, with Jesus and with one another, even when we are not able to break bread together.

I took my mask out for a spin this week when I went to perform some essential tasks in town – not that I thought I really needed it, more just for fun. I did feel self-conscious, but I remembered that when I have seen other people wearing masks out and about, I have felt encouraged and supported by them – they are doing it for the health of the whole community. And so as I went around keeping a healthy social distance from people, with the potentially lifesaving barrier of my mask between us, I delighted in the recognition that we are doing all of this – the separation and isolation, the 2 metres of physical distance, the protective clothing – we're doing it for one another. We may not ultimately all need masks if things continue to go well, but I like to think that this mask, while a barrier between us, is also an expression of love and connection and shared hope for a healthy future in our region, in our nation, and in the whole world.



And so may the unrecognised Christ, known in the breaking of bread, invisible to our eyes and yet present to our hearts, encourage you in faith, support you with hope and fill you with love. And may you be sustained by the spiritual connection with his body here and throughout the world. Amen.