

'They didn't recognize Him, do we?'

Third Sunday of Easter Year A

Luke 24:13 - 35

(Acts 2:14a,36 – 41, Psalm 116:1-4,12-19, 1 Peter 1:17-23)

St Peter's 8 am and 10 am 23 April 2023

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Allelujah! Allelujah!

What a joyous way we get to affirm Christ's resurrection in the weeks of Easter.

As Christians, living this side of Jesus resurrection, Christ's world changing, life changing event, can be taken a little for granted. Allelujah!

Jesus has conquered the grave. Jesus has conquered death itself.

Exciting! Mind blowing! What did it mean for the people in Jesus' day?

They understood resurrection but not in the way Jesus had been teaching them. Their understanding was more that of Martha who said, when Lazarus had died, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'

Even when Jesus said he was the resurrection and the life and spoke of his body, the temple, being raised in three days, they missed it.

The disciples and many others of that day were expecting Jesus to physically release them from the hardship of the Roman rulers. They were waiting for a more Moses like exodus from their troubles, but Jesus had been teaching about a new way of kingdom living. A new creation. No wonder they were all grieving.

Our Acts reading sees the transformation as Peter powerfully shares Jesus' love and forgiveness and how that, through Jesus' death and consequent resurrection, Jesus can turn death on its head and usher in new, everlasting

life even for those who had been instrumental in seeing Jesus killed – and make no mistake – that also includes us.

In our reading from 1 Peter, Peter again pulls out the heavy truths. The people of Peter's day - and us still today - are - to quote Peter, 'redeemed from our empty way of life by the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.' Peter makes the connection absolutely from the old sacrifice system to our need to believe in Jesus Christ, the perfect, sinless Lamb of God, and in God who raised Him and glorified Him. This new hope and faith in God comes with both privilege and responsibility. We are born again of imperishable seed through the living and enduring word of God and as a result we are to love each other sincerely and deeply from the heart. That is NOT EASY. We need God's help daily to enable us to love others with His love, to see people through His eyes.

Each of the gospels brings a slightly different account of the resurrection, things like who saw how many angels or just who entered the empty tomb, who saw Jesus and even about the lie the guards were paid to promote as truth, by the chief priests and elders. Luke brings us the longest account. Have you ever wondered why varying gospel accounts?

Many years ago, at OMF's missionary boarding school, Chefoo, in Malaysia, the Principal was taking Evening Prayers for the whole school. He had asked an enthusiastic group of children who loved drama, to act out a particular Bible story. He also chose four children to be witnesses. After the excellent, short drama each witness left the room. One by one they came in and gave their eye - witness accounts. They all saw the exact same drama. EVERY ACCOUNT HAD SOME DEGREE OF DIFFERENCE! It made it even more authentic, as we considered that all human beings have different personalities and interests.

Our gospel accounts were written, up to 70 years after the actual events, and from different language and viewpoints. Luke was more likely not to have even been there but to have faithfully recorded what others told him. One thing we do know. At least 12 times Jesus appeared to one or more person and 1 Corinthians 15:6 records that over 500 people saw Jesus alive at the same time after his crucifixion and death through to his Ascension to Glory. More than enough eyewitness accounts to ring true.

While Luke 24 has previously introduced us to the grieving women and the grieving, fearful, hiding apostles, John's gospel is worth a brief look at both Mary Magdalene and Thomas and their recognition of Jesus in their pain. Mary recognized Jesus, despite her intense grief, when He said her name. How precious, how wonderful that Jesus knows **all** our names. Oh, that we would have such a close walk with Jesus that He can get our attention and recognition as soon as He speaks, whatever pain or circumstance in life we are going through. His love is that deep for each one of us.

Thomas wanted proof from Jesus but when he saw Jesus his response was immediate, and very heart felt. "**My Lord, and my God.**" What a faith statement! What true recognition. Was it wrong for him to have doubts? Is it wrong for us? Jesus, in the gospels, continually meets people at their point of need.

A line from the chorus of an Anne Murray song entitled "The Other Side" sums it up well. "...on the other side of doubt is faith..."

We **can** have genuine questions **if** they lead us towards Jesus and His truthful answers. He didn't condemn Thomas. He knew him and met him in those questions. He knew Thomas wanted true relationship more than dogma. I find that immensely reassuring. I hope you do too.

Lazarus was raised from the dead but back into ordinary life. It was not a new resurrection body. He needed to die again. In amazing contrast Jesus overcame death and moved into resurrection life – yes, with a resurrected body - similar but different, still with His wounds, still able to eat bread and fish, but with new properties - able to move through walls & time.

Jesus constantly surprises. His miracles, eg his healing of the blind often saw Him use a different method for their healing. Why? Perhaps it kept people on the edge of their seats, or perhaps more literally learning on their sturdy walking sticks to see what he would do and how the person, and the bystanders including the disciples, & Pharisees would respond.

In Luke 24, he's 'on the road again' as he catches up with two companions on their 11 km walk to Emmaus, possibly a 2 – 3 hour walk. We know one is Cleopas. We don't fully know whether the companion is his wife or a fellow male disciple from the wider group.

We do know that they are both grieving, confused, and struggling to have any hope, struggling to make sense out of seeing their 'hoped for Messiah' crucified and buried rather than saving them politically, socially and spiritually from the Roman rule and the overabundance of extra rules required by the Pharisees. For all they knew – Jesus was dead.

Jesus could have just announced who he was. He didn't. Jesus found them on the way, walked alongside and entered their journey. He wants relationship with each of his disciples – those in Bible times and each of us now. Even as he did with all the others in the upper room.

These two companions were incredulous that Jesus didn't seem to know what had been happening in Jerusalem. Luke 24:16 states 'BUT THEY WERE KEPT FROM RECOGNISING HIM'. They were quick to recount their version

of events. Perhaps He asked the questions to draw them out on the happenings of the last few days, which **can** help people cope with grief a little better, but more importantly probably to find out where their level of understanding about him was currently. Also, I wonder, was He laying it out so they would then share his unveiled teaching with the disciples.

What would he have taught them? **Absolute TRUTH.**

(NB. I am still not sure if sharing the Indian fable below in Italic is right

Unlike an Indian fable from many years ago which tells of six blind men being taken to see an elephant. Each of them took hold of a different part of the elephant's body and were quite sure of their truth. Though they had only part of the truth.)

Jesus, as we know from hindsight, **IS TRUTH.** He would have spent the next hour or so sharing the truth from their own Jewish scriptures as they journeyed closer and closer towards Emmaus. Scripture from the first five books of the Bible, truth from the prophets, passages from the psalms and more. All of them concerning himself as a Messiah who had to suffer and die before entering his glory, helping them to see that his resurrection meant **He was their true Messiah, their risen Lord and not just of them but Lord of the world!** Satan defeated! And disarmed!

The resurrection of Jesus ushered in the beginning of the NEW creation and all the disciples – male and female – past and present - were commissioned to share the Good News with others – especially with those who didn't know the resurrected Jesus. As He had taught during the sermon on the mount,

they were to be salt, flavour, and light, to bring renewal to the darkness of the world. What an amazing privilege to share Jesus.

As they neared Emmaus, Jesus prepared to move on but was invited to take food with them. He took the bread, broke it, gave thanks, and began to give it to them. Recognition came immediately. They had seen him break the bread before. Possibly many times. Imagine being them. Just as recognition dawned - Jesus disappeared from their sight.

They had a renewed grounding in scripture and a fresh awareness of his presence. Especially as they broke bread. What an awesome revelation.

Jesus met them on their journey, He grounded them in the Word of God, He reassured them as their Lord, their Living Word. They recognized His presence as He broke bread with them. Their hearts burned within them, and they sped straight back to Jerusalem to share with the other followers.

We too, can read Scripture, we too are repeatedly invited to spend time with Jesus and, as we come to the Eucharist, we, in some mysterious way, have the living presence of Jesus with us, as those companions did at Emmaus, His renewal of life as we eat the bread and drink the cup. **How blessed we are.** May we recognize Jesus voice afresh today in the Eucharist, may we see the love of Christ in our friends & in those we don't know. May we quickly recognize Him & respond as He says our name. May we, like Thomas affirm again **'My Lord & my God.'**