

He's Alive

Reading: Luke 24: 36 - 48

Well, as we look at our reading this morning, we see the disciples of Jesus gathered together in a house with the doors well and truly locked. And they're talking about him – talking about Jesus. And, of course, they're talking about him because he'd become the most important person in their lives, the one who was their Lord and friend, the one they'd grown to love over the last 3 years they'd spent with him.

But it was only a short time before that, they'd stood at a distance, helpless to do anything as hardened Roman soldiers had nailed him to a cross of wood and killed him. And they were now trying to make some sense of reports coming to them from different sources of Jesus having been seen alive. And so our reading opened with these words: 'while they were still talking about this, Jesus stood among them.' They were talking about Jesus. And how often do we talk about Jesus I wonder?

And I remember, a number of years ago now, the occasion when I and some others were being licensed in the Minster as Readers, and the Archbishop in his sermon included a quote which caught my attention. And it was from Michael Ramsay, a former Archbishop of Canterbury who, when he was talking to a group of Readers said this: "If you are stuck for words, just talk about Jesus. Anything about him as your Lord, Saviour and Friend will do."

I thought that was great - 'Just talk about Jesus.' And, of course, talking to others about Jesus and sharing his story with them is what we were looking at in our recent Lent Course.

And so if we turn now to our reading, it's the evening of the day that Jesus was raised from the dead and the disciples, as they are gathered together are in a state of shock and bewilderment. It's a lot for them to take in and nobody really knows what's going on. And as they are still talking about it all, Jesus is suddenly there in the midst of them and saying 'Shalom' which, of course means 'peace be with you' although I think 'Shalom' has a much richer and fuller meaning.

But you can imagine how unnerving this must have been for them – knowing (as they do) what happened to Jesus they are fearful that they're going to be next. And it's hardly surprising, as we heard from Tony in last week's sermon, that they've jolly well made sure the doors are locked to keep themselves safe.

And so we get something of the feel of the highly anxious state these disciples find themselves in. Just think about it, they're jumpy and on edge and then suddenly on top of all this they realise someone else is in the room who wasn't there before.

And, of course, they're terrified and think they're seeing a ghost and it's not surprising really. I mean it's not usual to see someone die on a Friday afternoon and then next thing they are greeting you fully alive on the following Sunday evening. These things just don't happen. And Jesus says to them: "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?" And I suppose we might think "OK Jesus give these guys a break – it is a bit of a shock you know." But Jesus does go on to say "But I did tell you this is what was going to happen when I was with you."

And, in effect, what he's saying is "why did you not believe my word – why did you not believe - I told you that this was the way it was going to happen?" Maybe the Lord is saying something like this to some of us this morning. Maybe we are troubled or anxious over

something and he's saying "Why don't you trust me? Why don't you hand all that care and anxiety over to me.

And we see how gentle Jesus is with them here. He doesn't get cross, or anything like that with them for their doubts. He doesn't say "what's wrong with you guys" – no – he's gentle with them, he shows them his hands and his feet – the scars of where the imprints of the nails have been as they held him to the cross. And he says "Look – go on, reach out and touch me, a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

And this is important for us to understand as Jesus is now in his resurrection body and it's a body of flesh and bone. It's not a spirit it's a human body. It is a human body yet it is in some way different as it's not stuck with the same limitations as our present human bodies. It's not a body that hungers, or gets tired and locked doors are not an issue for it as it can move quite easily from one dimension to another. And above all it's one which is forever alive and for which death no longer has its sting.

And what's also important for us to understand is that the New Testament tells us that for those who follow Jesus, a day his coming in God's new world when our 'lowly bodies will be transformed so that they will be like his glorious body.'

Another New Testament writer puts it like this:

'But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.'

And this is what Tom Wright says in his book 'Surprised by Hope' – 'the resurrection body of Jesus, which at the moment is almost unimaginable to us in its glory and power, will be the model for our own.'

Our reading then says 'they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement...' And I think what it's saying here is, a bit like what we say, when something really good happens quite unexpectedly that makes us happy and we go "Wow - I can't believe it!" I think Rachael Blackmore said something like that when we she won the Grand National just over a week ago.

Then it gets quite amusing as Jesus says to them "Do you have anything here to eat?" and so they give him a piece of broiled fish. (At least that's how it's described in the NIV translation.) Broiled fish! Now I'm not sure what 'broiled fish' is but it sounds horrible. But Jesus takes it and eats it in their presence. And I can imagine them all sat around, staring in amazement – with eyes and mouths wide open as they watch it disappear.

And, of course, Jesus is doing all this to encourage them and to say "Yes – it really is me."

He then goes on to say "Look this is what I told you when I was with you, how it would be and how the Messiah would have to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day."

And to encourage them more he takes them through the Old Testament Scriptures showing them all the things in there that pointed to him and what would happen. Maybe he told them about the one who would crush the serpent's head as it struck at his heel in Genesis chapter 3; or about the Passover Lamb that was slain in the book of Exodus; or the one who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities in Isaiah 53.

And, of course, that's why it's important that we shouldn't discard the Old Testament as it's all part of God's big story. And there's something else we need to notice, in that it says Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. You know, there's a way of reading the Bible that brings it alive for us. It's when we go beyond just reading it as a

textbook – it’s when we allow the Lord to open our eyes to understand what he wants to say to us through it. And that opens up a whole new dimension and it’s exciting. And we begin to see things we’ve never seen before – and it begins to change us.

If we look at John’s account of this event it says ‘he breathed on them and said receive the Holy Spirit.’ And it’s as we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us that we can gain those insights from Scripture that can have such a powerful effect on our lives. The writer to the Book Hebrews says this:

‘For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

And this post resurrection appearance of Jesus, we have been looking at today, is just one of a number of appearances he made to his followers over a period of 40 days prior to his ascension. One minute he’s sharing a meal and breaking bread with the two friends he’d been walking alongside, and sharing fellowship with on the road to Emmaus and the next minute all that’s there - are just some broken crumbs left on the table, and an empty chair. And then, as we have just seen, the disciples are in a room together with the doors firmly locked and the next minute – there’s Jesus.

And, of course, we can add to that, the story of the disciple, Thomas He’s been saying things, thinking that Jesus has not been there and then later discovers Jesus has heard every word he’s said.

And so what are we to make of all these comings and goings. Well it seems to me that Jesus is teaching his disciples, and us, that we don’t necessarily need to see him to know that he is there. And this is what one writer says:

‘Wherever we may go, we may not see Jesus in the room, we may not be able to put out a hand and seize his arm for some comfort, but he is there, he is listening and he is watching.’

And some of the last words of Jesus before his ascension, and recorded for us at the end of Matthew’s Gospel are this:

‘And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen

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Sermon preached at St Laurence’s, Scalby on Sunday 18th April 2021