



## Revd Ro's Reflection on The Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 3.12-19

Luke 24.36b-48

This gospel passage begins, 'Jesus himself stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' This resurrection appearance takes place on the eve of Easter Sunday. We looked closely at the account of this from John's gospel last week. There are differences between his account and the gospel reading for today which begins abruptly, what did happen before Jesus appeared to his followers in the upper room?

Luke gives the account of the resurrection itself, Jesus himself does not appear to the women who had gone to the tomb at first light, <sup>10</sup> 'Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.' They see two men in white who tell of the resurrection.

The reaction of the disciples is different too; we are told they thought it was 'idle gossip'. It is Peter who takes notice of them, who goes to the tomb and who finds it just as they have said.

The account is followed by the appearance of Jesus on the Emmaus Road. It is, I admit, one of my favourite stories. I looked in detail at it in my first Reflection last year.

<sup>13</sup> 'Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.'

It is evening and the two disciples are walking home. We are not told who the other follower is but one is, 'They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' If we think back to the account of the crucifixion one of the women who stood at watching Jesus' last hours was 'Mary, the wife of Clopas.' Was this the same Cleopas and was this other follower that same Mary? We will never know. They recount to the 'stranger' on the road all that has happened and the women's news of the empty tomb. Jesus is at pains to reveal all the prophecies to them.

<sup>25</sup>'Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then

enter into his glory?' <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.'

Jesus is the promised Messiah who by his suffering has redeemed not only God's people the Jews but the whole created order. Jesus it is who in this new resurrection body has begun the new creation of God's perfected order. Jesus is part of the Godhead.

They still do not know him, even after he expounds the scriptures to them. It is the beautiful scene at the lamp lit table in Emmaus that I love. The two followers have invited Jesus to share a meal, a beautiful act of fellowship. It is then the scales fall from their eyes. They see because they understand.

<sup>30</sup>'When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

<sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup>They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem;'

They know him at the breaking of bread as we do in Holy Communion. They rush back there and then to Jerusalem. Once again there are differences from John's account.

'They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.'

To begin with the eleven are there, Thomas is with them. Secondly we have the words, 'and he has appeared to Simon!' We are not told of Simon's meeting with Jesus, simply that he went to the empty tomb. The disciples' words to the two are interesting. 'The Lord has risen indeed.' There seems to be excitement and also doubt though probably it was mixed with confusion.

<sup>36</sup> 'While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' <sup>37</sup>They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.'

Luke as with John is at pains to show us that the resurrection body is real, it is a physical body. Yet it is different, was it just that Cleopas and his companion were prevented from seeing Jesus or was his appearance different? We are told in John's account of the resurrection that Mary turned and saw Jesus standing there but 'she did not know that it was Jesus.' As I said in my Reflection for Easter morning there have been various reasons given to explain this. The truth is that we will never know. Suffice to say that Jesus is real, he stands among them and the disciples here do recognise him. They cannot of course comprehend it.

Of course they can't. Martha when she met Jesus as he came towards Bethany gave the traditional Jewish belief in resurrection.

<sup>21</sup>'Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' <sup>24</sup>Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'

Resurrection to the Jews, who believed in it, would be a collective event, on the last day when God's perfected order was brought in. Jesus promises resurrection life through him. Jesus' resurrection brings in the new creation.

<sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' <sup>27</sup>She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

The disciples cannot comprehend a person coming back from life like this unless it is a ghost. The raising of Lazarus, the widow of Nain's son and Jairus' daughter are really resuscitations. They are subject to the laws of nature. They will die in the course of time.

Jesus is raised forever, he has conquered death. He is Lord of the cosmos, he is master of life, death and the powers of nature. He created it!

<sup>1</sup>'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life,' John 1.1

People cannot understand how Jesus can appear with a physical body at will and then disappear defying the laws of nature. But surely that is the point; he controls the laws of nature. Jesus is man and God and that is never demonstrated more clearly than here.

Jesus' first act has been to say those words as in John, 'Peace be with you.' That deep wholeness of shalom is sorely needed; they are 'terrified' as they stare at what they think is a ghost. It is all their minds could possibly understand.

But it is the Risen Jesus who stands before them. Their 'joy' is still tinged with 'disbelief and wonder.' Just as he did to Thomas he shows the marks of the nails in hands and feet. He makes it quite clear he has flesh and bones. What is more, he eats fish in front of them.

Now, just as to Cleopas and his companion, he reveals the scriptures to them.

<sup>44</sup> 'Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.'

<sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. '

Jesus is fulfilling the scriptures. This was God's plan from the beginning of time; Jesus would herald in the new created order. Beginning at Jerusalem and 'to be proclaimed to all nations' the wonderful good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is to be taken out into the world. The news is that Jesus, by his death and resurrection, has saved humanity and won new life for us; the wonderful good news that lives lived in and for him will never be the same. Indeed this good news will turn the world upside down! They are 'to proclaim these things.' What a commission. There is no way they could do anything in their own strength. In John, Jesus breathes on them and gives the Holy Spirit; now in Luke he says in the sentence after our passage ends :

<sup>48</sup>'You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

This is the coming of the empowerer, the sustainer, the strengthener, the Holy Spirit which will come upon them and transform them at Pentecost. They will be new made people, God's people, God's witnesses who will indeed, with those who follow them, take the good news out into the world with the authorisation of Christ. It is a huge privilege and a huge responsibility.

I always write these Reflections ahead of time. Today it has been announced that HRH Prince Philip has died. Of all the tributes that have poured in for him throughout the world I was particularly moved by that of Archbishop Justin. When asked about Prince Philip's beliefs he said he was 'a man of profound faith.' He also said this,

'Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'

This he said is what Philip has done, while following Jesus he has also followed the Queen and has taken up the great burden with her willingly and selflessly throughout his life.

That is what the disciples are called to do. Take up that great burden of responsibility and yes sometimes suffering and go forth into the world to proclaim his name. Go now and do your job. That is what Jesus says to each one of us. The job you were commissioned for at your baptism. That job is not just proclaiming the word of Jesus it is doing it. It is living it hour by hour, day by day, year by year. It means this, 'love one another as I have loved you.' Anyone who does not 'care for these the least of my brothers and sisters' does not live the Christian life.

What we do not have here in our reading is what follows in the gospel passage,

<sup>50</sup> Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup>While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup>And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; <sup>53</sup>and they were continually in the temple blessing God.'

Jesus is taken from them now. Once again people wonder, we have seen Jesus show his disciples his physical body, he has eaten with them now he is simply 'taken into heaven' what is happening? But this is just the point surely. Jesus is master of the cosmos and the laws of nature because he is God.

This is the fundamental tenet of our faith. We believe that Jesus is the incarnate God, human and divine. This is put so beautifully in one of my favourite hymns,

*'Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity, in perfect harmony, the man who is God. Lord of eternity dwells in humanity, kneels in humility and washes our feet.'*

He is the Lord of all and now is with the Father but with us too.

So in our two passages we have the juxtaposition of two pictures of the disciples; the first, in the upper room on the eve of Easter day.

<sup>37</sup>'They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost...<sup>41</sup>While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering,'

The second picture of the disciples is in our passage from Acts. Luke writes Acts and it follows seamlessly from his gospel as he shows the disciples acting out Jesus' commandment that we have just looked at here.

The coming of the 'power from on high' is told in Acts 2. 1-21 and we will look in detail at this at Pentecost. Suffice to say that these are men transformed! They have the power and authorisation of the Holy Spirit. They have walked with Jesus now he walks with them. They no longer have to walk alone but are empowered, strengthened. They are still human and fallible, this is still a huge and daunting task but they have a commission, an authorisation and a power within them.

The gospel passage says that after Jesus had ascended they went to the temple. This is where the gospel ends. It is where our passage from Acts begins – at the temple. It again is a passage which begins half way through as it were. What happens prior to it is vitally important. Luke is so precise even to the time, the time of prayer and the place.

'One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>2</sup>And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple.'

This scene would be ideal for filmmakers. Imagine the scene; the lame beggar sitting waiting for alms, expecting nothing more. It is an automatic act, he is begging. But look what happens,

<sup>4</sup>Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' <sup>5</sup>And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. '

Peter and John look at him, he is told 'look at us.' The camera would follow the meeting of eyes. When that happens it is a special moment like the moment of the breaking of bread at Emmaus. <sup>6</sup>'But Peter said, 'I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.' <sup>7</sup>'And he took him by the right hand and raised him up;'

Peter and those first followers have been strengthened by the power of the Spirit, they are no longer afraid BUT, and this is the point, they have received the authorisation and power of God himself and can work the wonders Jesus himself said they would. That is the transformation. They literally have the power of Jesus within them. We remember that whenever Jesus did a 'sign' he did it in the power of his Father – always he said that. That is what people must understand now. Look at Peter's words, 'in the name of Jesus of Nazareth stand up and walk.' Immediately he not only stands, he jumps and runs and exalts and cries out. Imagine the scene in the crowded temple. It would have caused a stir much as Jesus did when he overturned the tables. Here is Peter doing miracles of healing right there at the temple gate. The worshipers knew this lame man and they had known him for years. Now here he was leaping for joy. Of course he 'clung to Peter and John.' The people rush to Solomon's portico – exact detail again, and there Peter addresses them. This is where our reading for today begins. Just look at his wisdom, authority and power!

<sup>12</sup>'When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, 'You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?'

Peter wants to witness to Christ. Let's get one thing cleared up at the start; he says don't look with wonder at us as if we did this through our own power – no look, and then understand.

<sup>13</sup>'The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus,'

This has been done in the power of God in Jesus Christ. He is the Messiah sent to redeem the Jewish people, promised throughout their history, sent to redeem the world!

Now comes the really brave bit – the Peter of the upper room in our story from Luke's gospel would have been amazed if he could have looked into the future and seen what he would do in Jesus' name and Jesus' power. What he does is tell the crowd straight exactly what they did to Jesus. They had him killed, they called for his blood even when Pilate the brutish Roman governor recognised his innocence and wanted to release him.

<sup>14</sup>'But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, <sup>15</sup>and you killed the Author of life,'

They killed the Messiah. He calls them murderers to their faces for that is the truth and he is called to proclaim the truth. Maybe it is worth pausing here and challenging ourselves. How often do we stand up for the truth, support the truth. It is easier to be quiet and say nothing. It is not however the way of Jesus. The Christian faith calls us to challenge ourselves all the time for Jesus sees deep into our hearts and souls. Indeed that was what Lent was about in part.

Jesus was killed but he rose from the dead, this is the proclamation of Peter, 'whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. <sup>16</sup>'And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.'

Now Jesus is raised all is changed. I have just watched the memorial service for Prince Philip from Canterbury Cathedral. Archbishop Justin in his sermon said how the new creation came through Jesus' resurrection. The new creation is a new way of being; a new life lived in Christ. It opens the eyes that were spiritually blind to a new way of seeing. New creation, he said breathes life and

peace into people who believe. We see the disciples here full of the Holy Spirit and new life. This new way of being means that all will be changed. It changes us if we let it.

This lame man has been 'made perfect through the power of God.' he is if you like a symbol of new creation, not just his physical restoration but spiritual restoration in Christ. Jesus brings a new holy order to the world, to each individual who turns to him. He gives spiritual sight to eyes that before were 'blind.'

Peter turns from the accusation to the future that begins with repentance and forgiveness. He addresses them; they are 'friends,' like children who acted in ignorance.

<sup>17</sup> 'And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. <sup>18</sup>In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. <sup>19</sup>Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,

Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the one foretold, the one to suffer for the sins of humanity. He is the one who brings forgiveness of sins, redemption to all who repent and turn to him.

We are people of God's new creation. We too have a huge commission to live out the good news of God's kingdom, to live in love as children of our Heavenly Father.

The funeral of the Duke of Edinburgh will take place on the day that this Reflection is published. As Archbishop Justin said we rejoice in the resurrection in these days of Easter. We believe in the eternal life won for us by Jesus Christ and we commit The Duke to his loving care. We join with others all over the world to give thanks for his life and to pray for Her Majesty the Queen and her family.

*'He comes the broken hearts to heal, the pris'ners to free; the deaf shall hear the lame shall dance, the blind shall see.'* Graham Kendrick.

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