

Head and Heart

14th April 2024

Third Sunday of Easter

Readings

Acts 3: 12 – 19

Psalm 4

1 John 3: 1- 7

Luke 24: 36b - 48



Jesus - to be sure!

It is noticeable in the immediate resurrection stories there is much hesitation about believing Jesus to be alive again. All his followers wanted it to be true, but had he really meant it? How would he look? How could they be sure it was him? Were they all so eager to see him? What would he say to those who had deserted him – to Peter who had denied him? Would there be that look which sometimes tore your being to shreds while wrapping you in understanding, forgiving love? Luke's account of the disciples at Emmaus and back in the city has that same element of uncertainty! Cleopas and Mary, whom we believe could be step aunt and uncle to Jesus, while still not recognising him, had invited him, as a stranger into their home and shared a meal with him. Then that moment of loving recognition. They were sure enough to straightway make the six-mile return journey to Jerusalem where with great enthusiasm they shared their experience with a secreted meeting of the eleven disciples. They too had received a visit from him, but then, when Jesus appeared in the same way to them all together, they were terrified and asked, *Is it really him? Or are we seeing a ghost?* Jesus calmed them with his familiar *Peace be with you*, in the way he had once pacified them in a ferocious Galilee storm. Now, he ate with them – *Watch me! Touch me! Feel me! Eat with me! Remember how I told you it would be like this. How I showed you proof from the scriptures about my passion, death, and resurrection! And there's much more to come! You are to be witnesses to it all for me. I'm real! I want you and everyone who hears to know and be sure!* Confirmation came in many ways during the following days right up to Pentecost when the Emmaus *heartburning* became a *raging fire of certainty* for them all.

Peter and John had no doubts when weeks later in the Temple they witnessed one of Jesus' miracles and Peter used the opportunity to preach to the crowd which gathered. Remembering that incident commonly centres on a once-lame man jumping around while screaming thanks and praise to God. I like to concentrate on the two disciples, Peter, and John, once fearful about a ghost in the upper room, now testifying with powerful, absolute certainty about Jesus being alive and real. Peter preached with confidence – *We are not miracle workers. Jesus did this! He's alive and healing as he was before. We are his witnesses. He's working in us and through us, telling of the Father's gracious forgiveness for sins, of new beginnings for body, mind, and spirit for everyone.* So, they challenged their hearers to get the feel of Jesus. To know him! To be sure of his real presence, his healing, his peace.

Centuries later we still encounter the doubts. Is the story real? Is Jesus alive with us? Are all those promises true? Why is the Kingdom progress so slow? We learn that healing miracles are not often instant answers to impatient prayer orders but wise and purposeful gifts of God's grace. Faith stumbles and every fall can be a learning, loving, growing, deepening experience, every failure an opportunity.

It is worth asking from today's scripture readings what was it brought about the change from doubting fear to a '*this I know*' testimony. Many things! Sharing the fears in fellowship. Walking a long road of hope together while refreshing our knowledge of scriptures and testimonies. Then, sometimes he's suddenly there, or more often he appears, as he did at the lakeside (John20) like a person approaching through morning mist.

I recall a young person telling me, *I discovered Jesus in a church where people spoke of him as being real. It seemed he was consciously involved with everything which happened there!* That's the theme which runs through today's readings, as it does in Peter's preaching – *He's real. Believe in God through him. Repent and prove his forgiveness. Get the feel of him. He's real TODAY!* Years later, John who stood that day with Peter – already a gifted fisherman preacher – is still positively confirming the reality of Jesus in his letter to Christian communities where doubts are being sown and argued. *Friends, he writes, without doubt we are God's children – still at the beginning of our growing in Christ but sure that we shall be like Jesus. And finally, we shall see him as he really is. We shall hear his same assuring word – Peace! It's Me!*

A Prayer based on Psalm 4

*Lord, when my life is difficult;
When doubts replace the things I once took for granted,
I turn to you remembering how
you have answered my prayers in the past;
you have shown me kindness when even friends have let me down;
you have come close to me in the dark night of unbelief;
you have reached out to grasp my hand when I stumbled;
I have felt the warmth of your love,
the reality of your presence,
the peace of your forgiveness.
Many people have found satisfaction in your material gifts.
Your gifts of gracious blessing mean so much more to me.
I sleep peacefully, trusting your promise – 'It's me – Jesus – I'm with you!'*

