

## Easter 3 Luke 24:36b-48

Christ is risen, we are continually faced with this reality in our gospel accounts this Easter season. Not only have we heard testimony of the empty tomb but we have also heard the account of Jesus appearing to the disciples locked away in fear of the Jewish authorities, and in those circumstances Jesus appeared not once but twice in order to convince Thomas along with all the others.

This morning we hear from St Luke's gospel of another encounter with Jesus, and this is not unlike the testimony last week from St John's gospel but the timeline is a little different. In Luke's account this appearance of Jesus comes directly after the road to Emmaus story which occurs on the same day as the resurrection, Easter day. For St Luke these were the events that happened after Jesus rose from the dead, first he appeared to Mary in the garden, then to the two men on the road to Emmaus, then to those same men along with the other followers of Jesus and the disciples while they were still discussing the Emmaus journey.

But the manner of his appearance is remarkably similar, he greets them in the same way, "Peace be with you", and he offers the same proofs of his bodily resurrection, his hands and feet that they may touch him. Luke goes further to say what is only implied in John's gospel, Jesus tells them outright he is not a ghost and then proves it by eating in their presence. Jesus then went on to teach his disciples on more time about the scriptures and how they applied to him then gave them a job to do, he told them "you are witnesses of these things".

Jesus had appeared to the men on the road to Emmaus in a spiritual way, without revealing his identity his teaching warmed the hearts of the travellers and it was through the breaking of bread that they came to recognise Jesus. Here, Jesus is looking for physical witnesses and the whole community of disciples are together so that many have the opportunity to touch and see Jesus. There is no doubt that this is the same man that they all saw taken away and crucified. They are doubtful, but Jesus expected that, he says as much to them, "why do you doubt, look and see".

But most people would have been as frightened and doubtful, wouldn't you? Imagine yourself there for a moment, in the crowded room, 2 men have just told an amazing story but they didn't recognise Jesus, how could they have been certain it was the Lord? Lots of people study scripture, many have seen Jesus break bread before, could this have been a mistake? But then you look up to see Jesus right there, in the room with you, maybe someone calls out "it's a ghost, and Jesus responds, "I am no ghost, look, touch, believe". Your heart turns from fear to joy but the disbelief is still there, but in this moment joy is overwhelming, and the urge to share this good news.

We experience something of that joy as we recall these resurrection encounters but it is so hard to witness to the Lord's resurrection today. The Emmaus road encounter is not so bad, many people can accept a continuing spiritual presence of Jesus, they hear his teaching in scripture and feel something special at the Eucharist, but a physical resurrection is a step too far. It is much easier to dismiss these encounters as a mass hallucination, for wishful thinking and feeling a presence of someone we have loved and lost with us a times in our lives is an experience many of us share. It is hard to be a witness to the resurrection today but we are called to that ministry and all we have is the witness of those who were there and their testimony. We can do no more than affirm that story, explain it as the bedrock of our faith, witness to the living power of God in our lives, it is hard, but isn't the truth often hard to hear?

St. Luke's account of Jesus' ministry after the resurrection is far more detailed than the other synoptic gospels. Both Matthew and Mark say very little after the empty tomb, but Luke's gospel was written later and to a wider mixed audience of gentile background as well as Jew, in his account he was able to go into detail about events that had perhaps been questioned by early followers, or that new Christians found it hard to understand. Luke takes this one and makes it quite clear that there are many witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, that his presence among them was corporeal not ghostly, that the disciples didn't believe it in the beginning either, and that it had all been foretold in the scriptures. This is a comprehensive response to the doubts that have always been raised about the resurrection and moving forward with this gospel in the early church, Christians had a well-tested resurrection faith which had been forged out of amazement, disbelief and a reasonable amount of fear.

The suggestion that Christians have always been weak minded and easy to convince of fairy stories just simply isn't true. Our intellect is often questioned by those who do not share our faith but we, like Christians through the ages, have used our intellect to come to the conclusion that our faith is truth. To believe this stuff everyone has to give it a terrific amount of thought, you don't just accept it without question.

The disciples knew this because they too had needed to be convinced. To ensure future generations had the same evidence as them they told the story truthfully and carefully to keep the ministry of witness alive. But being convinced of the story on an intellectual level is just what's required to begin the process of living a life of faith. Christianity is not a science, full of proofs and experiments, it is a lived experience which engages our feelings, our relationships, our reason and our learning. To witness to others is not primarily about convincing them of the Good news through debate, it is to live lives of faith openly, generously and in the knowledge and love of God in our lives. That is where the convincing happens, that is where God draws people in, when they see what love does to us, how forgiveness is a better response to evil than revenge, how kindness, gentleness, joy and all the fruits of the spirit can make a difference in our lives and the lives of those around us. We witness to the good news of Jesus Christ by living with the joy that it brings each of us openly, honestly and confidently.