

Sermon for Easter 2 April 26 2020

*“When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.
31 And their eyes were opened and they recognized him;”*

There is a common theme running through the resurrection appearances of our Lord. No one appears to recognise him. Or more accurately, people fail to recognise Jesus until he identifies himself through some particular action or word.

Mary Magdalene, the first person to see him raised from the dead, recognised him only when he spoke her name. The disciples in the upper room recognised him in his greeting, “Peace be with you”. The disciples fishing recognised Jesus when he called to them from the shore. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus recognised him when he blessed the bread, broke it, and shared the meal.

It seems that the body of Jesus, even though missing, is not the body in which he is raised to life. There is something very different about him. This tells us that Jesus was not merely resuscitated. St Paul speaks of putting off the physical body and being clothed in the spiritual body, and, this will happen in the twinkling of an eye. It happens very quickly. It would certainly explain to some degree why people who were very close to Jesus in his earthly life would fail to recognise him in his spiritual body.

When Jesus was raised from the dead something very special, something very different, happened. He was not just the same as before and he is not a ghost, or a wandering spirit. Jesus Christ, the Word of God, is raised from the dead, and because he is raised from the dead, so are we. Through his death on the cross we are blessed with life.

Luke very cleverly captures the essence of the divine in his account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. *“Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”¹⁹ And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened.*

Luke outlines the life of Jesus, and his identified role on earth, in just a couple of sentences. The people were rightfully convinced that Jesus is a prophet. They believed that Jesus would be the one who would redeem Israel. From the voice of the disciple we hear once again the account of the passion and death of Jesus.

The interesting topic absent from all encounters is the teaching that Jesus would rise from the dead. Luke makes reference to the fact that three days have passed since the crucifixion. And then the identity of Jesus is revealed. Jesus declared that he would rise from the dead after three days and this has been proven to be the case.

The fact that Jesus was able to teach from the scriptures of the time the prophecies and the teaching which related to him is profound. That the Christ must suffer these things before returning to Glory is a fundamental teaching of the faith. In each of the gospels Jesus has been teaching that he is to return to Jerusalem where he will be betrayed, imprisoned, killed and that on the third day he will rise again.

The disciples have not understood this profound news. For them the earthly presence of Jesus meant everything.

They have witnessed, and been part of, all sorts of miracles while they have been with him. He heals the sick, casts out demons, gives sight to the blind. He can even raise people from the dead. It is very special to be with him and we can imagine them staying with Jesus because they want to be part of the action when he shows his full power and overthrows the enemies of Israel.

What they failed to see was that Jesus was offering a freedom of mind and of spirit. He was offering a freedom which was so far removed from politics and fights and wars that the people could not immediately comprehend what it was that Jesus was giving them, and of course, giving us.

When we think of faith it is so much more than instant gratification. It is so much more than playing politics and contests of power. Our faith is a relationship with God that allows us to live among all of these earthly snares, but to always rise above them so that we will always know the peace of heart, mind and soul that is ours through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

If we are secure in our faith then there is nothing in this world that can overwhelm us. Yes, there will be times of pain and grief, but in Christ we can overcome these. There will be times of loss and despair, but with Christ we can overcome these.

Faith in Jesus has never meant that nothing will ever go wrong in our lives. Faith in Jesus is the reassurance that when these things do happen we will not have to suffer them alone.

This is the key understanding of the resurrection of Christ. The promise is that our God is always with us. God is always by our side. In humility and trust we are to always seek our Lord and in seeking him to be constantly growing in our understanding and our conviction that we are not abandoned. We are not left to suffer alone and we are not, ever, abandoned by God.

During Eastertide we live over and over the experience of the early disciples. We share with them the grief and the fear of the passion and death of Jesus. And we also share with them the tremendous Joy of discovering that Jesus is raised from the dead, that he has returned to the glorious Godhead, and that, with Jesus, we will always be welcomed into the presence of the Father. This is the wonderful gift of Easter, and we rejoice with the disciples as Jesus enters our life and says, "Peace be with you."

Christ is risen Alleluia, Alleluia. He is risen indeed, Alleluia, Alleluia.