

## Sermon 18 April 2021

### Acts 3:12-19 and Luke 24:36-48

You know that feeling you get when you arrive somewhere a bit late and can't quite work out what is going on? Or you start watching a TV programme without realising it's the second episode and you haven't yet seen the first?

Well, this morning's readings both feel a bit like that. In Luke we are told: 'while they were talking about this'. What were they talking about? In Acts we are told: 'when Peter saw it'. Saw what? And then both readings go on to refer to something that in TV terms happened way back in Episode 3 of the First Series. And finally, the last bit of the reading in Acts, chops off what some consider to be the Easter message, ending instead on the Lent message of repentance.

Far be it from me to dispute the wisdom of those who constructed the lectionary, but it is always useful in these circumstances to read the bits that are tantalisingly left out.

Luke is recounting the events of the third day after the crucifixion. Mary of Magdala, Joanna and Mary, mother of James and the other women have been witnesses to the empty tomb and have been told by two men in dazzling white that Jesus has risen, as he said he would. The male disciples haven't believed their story, though Peter has gone to the tomb and is amazed to find it as they said.

Next, two of Jesus' followers, one named Cleopas, were walking away from Jerusalem when they were joined by a stranger, to whom they recounted the events of the crucifixion and the experience of the women. The stranger then interprets those scriptures that refer to Jesus. Then before a meal, the stranger blesses the bread and their eyes are opened to see that it Jesus. They rush back to Jerusalem to tell their story.

That is what the eleven disciples and their companions were talking about when the gospel reading begins. They are beginning to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead.

Jesus appears to them, whilst they are discussing the confusing events of the day. No wonder they are startled and terrified. I often think the language used doesn't do justice to the emotions that they must have been experiencing.

And in Acts, Peter and John are still in Jerusalem. They have gone to the Temple to pray. Their path takes them past a man begging, a lame man who is carried there every day. Instead of giving him money, Peter prays for him, declaring in the name of Jesus, stand up and walk. Which the man does and leaps around praising God. This drew a crowd of astonished people. It was the astonishment of the crowd that Peter saw.

Peter of course was present in the room when Jesus appeared. He heard him unpack the scriptures, everything written about Jesus in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms. He had of course also been present when Jesus had first told of these things while they were together in Galilee, though like all the other followers he hadn't understood.

Now, he tells the astonished crowd that the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has glorified Jesus.

Remember I mentioned references to things that happened in TV terms way back in Episode 3 of the First Series? Well, that's what Jesus and Peter are referring to.

Peter is referring to Exodus 3:6, where God speaks to Moses in the wilderness. Moses has noticed a burning bush, and turns aside to look at it. He hears a voice saying 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'. God then goes on to call Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and into freedom. By quoting this passage, Peter is saying, it's happening again. And this time the freedom that is promised is for everyone.

And when Jesus refers to everything written about him in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms, he too is cementing the connection with the scriptures.

Jesus is the new Moses, who gives bread in the wilderness. Jesus is the new Elijah, who raised a much loved man from death. Jesus is the new Isaiah who becomes the suffering servant. Jesus is the new Jeremiah who meets God's people in time of desperation and scarcity and brings them joy and abundance, bringing home all the outcasts and the excluded to his wondrous kingdom. And God does something to Jesus that he never did to any of the prophets, he raised Jesus to new life.

I mentioned that the reading from Acts seems to stop short. Acts 3:19 says 'Repent therefore and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out'. Good Lenten fare. Verse 20 is the Easter part and isn't used. It says: 'so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord'.

Why have I reached back into the setting of our readings of this morning?

I've been struck this year how this time immediately after Easter invites us to sit with the accounts of the resurrection. Told in similar but with different details in each gospel. How the church calendar doesn't gallop off after the next big story. It stays with the amazing, confusing, mysterious story. It lives with the past, the present and the future. It says that the story only makes sense in the context of the past, and tells us how to use it to make sense of the future, while equipping us to live in the present.

Because the God who was at work in and through Jesus is still working in and through him today. In the face of the wickedness of the cross, God goes on loving us and invites us to love others. Not in a theoretical way, but in a practical way.

We each have our own calling. Callings that change throughout our lives. We may be children, have children, grandchildren, god children. We work, paid or unpaid. We have responsibilities and are accountable for what we do. We are creative, we are generous, kind and gentle. We complement each other. We learn along side each other, from each other. We make mistakes. I've read somewhere that love works when we get on with the act of loving. Yet in doing so, we risk rejection and isolation, but in the words of Micah if what we do is to 'do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God', we will be learning to love our neighbour.

I had an interesting conversation yesterday with the manager of my corner shop. I had opened the door to find more than the permitted three people queuing to pay and so retreated outside. The man who had been behind me in the queue, followed me in and stayed in. The shopkeeper, when eventually I went in, said Thank You. Because he and all the other staff have been subject to so much abuse by people who aren't prepared to wait outside. He thanked me for my example, even if no one actually saw it! He felt cared for by my action.

When we are wondering who and how we should love may be think on this.

Of one of the many things that have been written about Prince Philip was this. On being asked about the love he had for the Queen he offered this quotation: 'Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction'. Maybe that is our response to Jesus' love for us. If we look where is Jesus looking, then maybe that is where we should direct our love, towards those whom Jesus is looking at.

Amen

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