

Sunday 26th April 2020

Good morning everyone,

I'd like to reflect for a few moments on Luke chapter 24, verses 36-53, which immediately follows the passage we looked at last Sunday. Let's read it now...

Have you ever noticed how, on occasions, we human beings need time for a new reality to sink in. I don't know about you, but when we were told on Tuesday 24th March that we were going to be locked down probably for three months, I don't think I properly took it in. I did think to myself, "if this is going to happen, I should go to Decathlon and buy myself some equipment to enable me to continue with my gym routine, but I didn't do it. I reckoned there would be at least a few days after the lockdown happened, when shops would still be open, and I'd be able to buy what I needed then, but that wasn't the case. Fortunately, I've been able to use some equipment from one of my sons, and then some bits and bobs from the house and the garden to put together a fitness routine. But my point is this: it often takes a while for a new reality to sink in with us and this is the case with the disciples in this passage.

By the beginning of today's reading, Luke has described earlier in chapter 24, that angels have told some of the women followers that Jesus has risen from the dead (in vs.5-7). He has also described the way that the risen Christ Jesus appeared to two male followers on the Road to Emmaus (in vs.13-32) and he gives us tantalizing reference to an appearance to Simon Peter (in v.34) that we know nothing else about. Despite all this evidence that Jesus was no longer dead, look at how the disciples react (in v.37) when he appears among them. Luke tells us they were "startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost..." But this encounter with the risen Christ is the tipping point, because from here on in, these followers of Jesus are full of confidence and faith. What made this encounter so life-changing and faith-changing for them.

Well firstly, the risen Christ showed these fear-filled disciples that they could be **confident in the evidence**. Notice how (in vs.39-43) he led them step by step through the reality that he really was alive. He started by saying "Look at my hands and feet and then said, "touch me". In effect, he was saying, "feel my flesh and my bones - I'm not just a ghost". Because they were still struggling to believe, he said, "do you have anything to eat" and he ate some fish in their presence. Up until this point, the disciples had been living in fear of the Jewish and Roman authorities; they had been hiding behind locked doors. But from now on, these same disciples would be prepared to die rather than deny that Jesus had risen. This transformation in their mindset is one of the reasons we can also be confident in the evidence for the risen Christ.

The Lord in his resurrected body also showed them that they could be **confident in their heritage**. He told the disciples (in v.44) that he is the fulfilment of the promises made in the Law, the prophets, and the psalms. This was the way that the Jews divided up what we call the Old Testament, so in effect, Christ is saying here that he is the focus, he is the hope, he is the light in the darkness that is promised across all of the Jewish holy writings. He was also telling them that they were a part of God's eternal plan of salvation, when he said (in v.48) "*You* are witnesses of these things". We each have a part to play in God's plans and purposes.

Early this week, I was informed about a hopeless and depressing situation for a family that I know. They were being treated appallingly and had been physically separated. But I've been privileged this week to see God's hand at work in that situation, so that now, although there are still challenges to be overcome, the people mistreating them have been exposed and they are reunited as a family. One of the most inspiring things to me about these recent events is how different people were invited by God to be obedient in performing various roles. A number of people had been faithful in supporting, encouraging and praying for this family; one person was asked to show hospitality and compassion in a very difficult situation; I was able to provide some practical support and advice; and one person in the family concerned had to show immense courage in speaking out the truth. I believe we are all spiritually connected through God's grace and therefore have a role to fulfil in seeing God's plans come about.

Finally, the risen Lord Jesus showed the disciples that they could be **confident in the power of the Holy Spirit**. He told them that his Father in heaven had promised them a gift, and we often read about this gift in the book of Joel (chapter 2, vs.28-32) where God says: "Afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions... and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." God's Spirit empowered the disciples to carry the Good News of Christ Jesus across the known world within their lifetime: an amazing feat! His Spirit is also available and at work in us: he invites us to work with him to see his Kingdom come in our lives and our relationships.