

Third Sunday of Easter – 26th April 2009

Sermon Text: Luke 24:39

Theme: “*I AM myself*”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus is not a figment of our imagination. He didn't rise as some sort of spiritual being. He rose to new life in body and soul and his resurrection provides us with the assurance that we too can look forward to our bodies being resurrected to be like Christ's in heaven.

Heavenly Father, through your Holy Spirit, reveal to us your risen Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jesus' body is resurrected

In Luke's account of Jesus' resurrection, the women go to the tomb with the intention of properly attending to the burial traditions familiar to the Jewish people. Of course Jesus' body is not there but instead they see two angels who tell them He is risen. The women then pass on this good news to the disciples. The problem was the news seemed too good to be true so they didn't believe them. In his typical style, Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself. He too saw only the linen cloths and so he went home marvelling to himself.

What then followed was the well-known story of the two travellers who were on their way to Emmaus. As they travelled and were talking about all the amazing things that had taken place in Jerusalem over the past days, Jesus appeared to them but for some reason they didn't recognise him. You will remember how Jesus joined them for the evening meal and when he took the bread, blessed it and broke it for all to share – it was then they recognised who he really was. Through Jesus serving his followers we see him revealed in our presence.

These followers then rushed immediately back to Jerusalem to pass on their exciting news to the eleven apostles who were still together. This is the backdrop to Luke's account of Jesus appearing once more to his closest followers. Jesus stood in their midst and said to them “Peace to you!” How do imagine you might react if you were in their shoes? We are blessed because we know how the story turns out. But for these poor friends of Jesus, they have seen their leader, their friend, their teacher betrayed, tried and executed. For them, they knew he had died and the question was, ‘what do we do now?’

All of a sudden, Jesus himself is standing in their midst saying, “Peace to you!” They acted as we might expect them to – they were terrified. A better translation for their reaction might be, “Being terrified and becoming afraid”. You get a sense that their immediate reaction was one of fear and astonishment and that fear only grew as they realised they were looking at a dead man. The obvious answer to what they were seeing with their eyes was that Jesus was a ghost – a figment of their imagination!

To ease their doubt, Jesus asks them some simple questions. You know, to ease the tension, bring them back to reality. “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet...touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as I have.” Jesus brings them back to the reality of his resurrection, nailed through his hands and feet, and that just as he was a real human being before his death, so too after his resurrection, he has been raised to real life.

It is perfectly natural that we too suffer from doubt and uncertainty in our faith life. The Bible makes all these claims regarding Jesus and none more outlandish than he died and was raised to life once more. It is a story that beggars belief. And yet just as Jesus appeared to the disciples travelling to

Emmaus, he appears to us in the breaking of the bread. Just as we may be filled with doubt and uncertainty in our dark hours, Jesus comes to us, when we have nothing more in the tank, and he says, "Peace to you!" There is that moment when it doesn't seem possible, yet you find the strength to carry on and realise it is God who is leading you all along.

To seal the deal for his poor disciples who must surely be wondering all the more as events seem so unbelievable, Jesus asked them a simple question, "Have you anything here to eat?" Why is this important to the gospel message? Well the Christian Church is grounded in the reality of life. Jesus rose not as a ghostly figure but as a real man and like all real people he wanted something real to eat. As Christians we gather in the Holy Communion of a real meal where Jesus gives his real body to us and it is here we recognise him and our faith is strengthened.

Jesus reveals himself as the great I AM

Now I glossed over an important part of Jesus' message of comfort and peace to his disciples. Right in the middle of his encouragement to his disciples he reveals himself as truly human and truly God. As he is saying, 'see my hands and feet...touch me and see', he binds this all together with the great resurrection I AM statement. Often shortened in English to, "I myself", the Greek words are the Greek form of the Old Testament for Yahweh, the holy name of God first revealed to Moses at the burning bush, "I AM".

It was Jesus claim to be "I AM" that both gave his followers the greatest hope but also gave his opponents the greatest ammunition to have him executed. The claim that he was "I AM" meant that Jesus was claiming to be God and this was the greatest form of blasphemy possible. That Christians still witness to Jesus as "I AM" still gives the greatest ammunition to those who don't believe. But more importantly it still gives the greatest hope to those who believe in his name and who are therefore being saved to eternal life.

Jesus shares the good news that he as true man and true God has defeated death and has now risen to life. Humanity may have executed him and our sins may have nailed him to the cross, but the god-man has buried death and given us life.

This is the core of Jesus' work of winning salvation for all humanity. Were Jesus just a great leader or teacher his death, while tragic, would have meant no more than any of the faithful people who had been before him or who followed afterwards. But in the person of Jesus we have the binding together of God and man. "I AM myself". In and of himself, Jesus' work of winning salvation for all people has been completed.

We now live in this new reality. As we go about our daily lives, doing all the things everyday people do, we live as those who have hope in the great I AM. Jesus comes to us through his word and through the gift of Holy Communion where he strengthens us with bodily nourishment for our daily living. Jesus binds himself to us through God's gift of Holy Baptism. We don't have to imagine how God's grace and mercy comes to us. We don't have to conjure up any feelings of being saved or being righteous. God gives this all as a grace gift to us and he is constantly working through the concrete and real means of grace – through real water in baptism. Through real bread and real wine in Holy Communion. And these real things bring us God's real grace and forgiveness.

Jesus was raised to new life and he stood in the midst of his followers and said, "Peace to you!" Jesus continues to come to us and in a real way brings us his peace. No longer does Jesus ask us for real food but instead he gives us real food which brings us his real peace.

May now this peace of God which passes all understanding, you with hearts of faith in our risen Lord, Christ Jesus. Amen.