

Easter Day – 31 March 2024

Message – Truth, Faith, and Love

Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Life, revealed to us through the lifting up of the Eternal Word, open our hearts and minds, ears and eyes, to your love. **Amen.**

On Maundy Thursday, I reflected on the nature of truth and how we know what is true. We talk about things being literally true, including the narratives of the Bible. Yet, for us, there is no literal truth, we always view life and give life meaning through the lens of the world as we understand it.

To give meaning to events, stories, and narratives, interpretation is required, which may be thought of as lit-er-ary truth. We give meaning to stories, which may or may not be the participants or the storytellers intended meaning. We give meaning to our own lives through the stories we tell of ourselves and the events, seasons, and movements, of our lives that are significant to us.

The Easter narratives of the Bible are all about the different interpretations of the events of the day. Each participant interprets the events as they experience them. The narrative and meaning are then shared through each person telling their part of the story to others, from which some degree of consensus and shared meaning emerges though we never fully know the perceptions of others.

It is sometimes joked that there are three kinds of people in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened.

The key witnesses in the story of Christ's death and resurrection are women supporters of Jesus from Galilee. Though Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus did make Christ's burial happen, it is the women who watched Christ die on the cross who provide continuity as they also watch the burial and see where Christ is laid to rest.

It is the women who then return two days later, on that first Easter morning, to find the tomb empty. Though John only tells us of Mary Magdalene, Mary's reference to 'we do not know where they have laid him' suggests, as the other gospels tell us, she was not alone in going to the tomb.

The other women, who did not rush off to tell Peter and John what has happened, are then the first to learn that Christ has risen from the dead. Their careful watching has led to understanding. They have seen the narrative in its completeness. At times, all of us must step back from our busyness and making things happen, to reflect on the wider context of life. Without such reflection, we risk heading in unintended directions with unintended consequences.

John and Peter run to the tomb. John is hesitant but Peter rushes in. Peter sees but is left wondering what happened. John sees and he really sees and he believes. For John, no further proof is required of all that Christ had been teaching the disciples. John in an instant perceives the truth.

The journey of faith is unique to each person. Even though Peter and John had both been with Jesus throughout his ministry, their immediate interpretation of the events differs. John believes, Peter remains in the 'wonder what happened' group. He will come to believe when he sees

Christ for himself later in the day. Peter needed a bit more evidence before he could have faith. I initially wrote 'come to the same understanding' but I doubt that it was the same understanding. They both had faith in Christ but the nature of that faith still reflected their different temperaments.

Faith is a journey. Some people can name the day when they first believed, some have never known a time when they didn't believe and, yet others, have slowly come to believe without being able to name at what point it happened, perhaps just noticing one day that 'yes, I really do believe in God's love for all creation.'

Faith is a journey that continues as long as we have breath. I am not sure what form our journey takes after death, that is a mystery beyond my understanding. The faith that you have today is hopefully deeper than the faith you had a year ago, or a decade ago, but sometimes we also go through seasons of doubt and questioning. These can be an essential part of our journey. And do not worry, Thomas got there first, he doubted, and then became the first to say of Jesus, '*My Lord and my God!*' Doubt and questioning are rarely comfortable but they are often integral to a deep faith.

Many of you will have worked out that I hang quite lightly to what some consider the literal truth of the Bible. It is not that I don't think that most of the events happened. Rather, it is the strange realisation that faith does not require the certainty with which I was brought up.

Nonetheless, all of us need something to help us come to the point of faith. Like Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John, what is required may be different for each one of us.

As Kim points out in her view from the pews this week, the transformation in the lives of the disciples alone is enough to make us take the life of Christ seriously. At least, if we are genuine seekers of the truth.

A serious reading of any of the gospels will lead us to ask deep questions the answers to which will shape our lives. As Christ put's it when facing Pilot, *'For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'*

Even today there are many people who do hear Christ's voice, whether directly or indirectly, and have heard, with their hearts and minds, the truth revealed in Christ: Each and every one of us was made to love and be loved.

This story of love is lived out in the life of Christ. A love that let go of life in order to experience life in all its fullness. A story of love lived out in the lives of countless saints, saints known to many, saints known to a few, saints known only to God.

Christ came to reveal this truth and the ultimate proof that Christ spoke the truth was in his resurrection. The extraordinary claims that Christ made are true.

Nonetheless, the resurrection of Christ remains open to interpretation. The Biblical evidence is strong. Today, we have listened to the oldest resurrection account, that found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Examine this and the other texts in the gospels, we find that, linguistically, it is only Luke that shares common ground with Paul's letter. Not a surprise, given Luke was Paul's companion.

The separate linguistic traditions of the synoptics, Paul, and John, suggest that the stories of the resurrection were well established and widely told in different ways in different communities, as we would expect for a real event.

Had the disciples created this story themselves we would expect there to be more uniformity in the telling. Yet as it is, the resurrection is recounted from multiple perspectives.

We have no good reason to disbelieve and plenty of good reasons to believe. So, we are probably left wondering why more people do not believe. The reality is that the church has not always lived out the gospel values that it proclaims.

Yet, all is not lost. It is in personal relationships, in acts of selfless care for neighbour, friends, and family, that the truth of the gospel is revealed in us, just as it was revealed in Christ. The combination of the gospels and seeing their truth lived out in the lives of other is powerful and for those who seek the truth, can be heard clearly.

None of us are the messiah, that role has already been taken. But in our own way, just as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, Peter, and John all lived lives that revealed the truth of the love of God, so we too can lead such truthful, faith filled, and loving lives that point to the truth of the gospel.

And, as we live such a life, we will find that our own faith deepens and we come to know the truth revealed in Christ more deeply and more personally and we find life in all its fullness, just as Christ promised.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen. He is Risen indeed, Alleluia.