

April 14

Discipleship: Prepared, Equipped and Following Christ

Acts 3.12-20, Psalm 4, 1 John 2.15-17, 3.1-6, Luke 24.36b-48

In Luke's Gospel, before today's reading, there is an account of the empty tomb, and then the encounter on the road to Emmaus. Then, with all that fresh in the disciples' minds, we have today's reading.

Jesus appears amongst the disciples and says, *Peace be with you*. This is a normal sort of greeting but also an indication of peace and goodwill. There was no condemnation or recrimination, any more than there was from Jesus on the cross. You know his words there, *Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*.

And now there is reassurance in this appearance. Jesus again shows the disciples the physicality of his new reality. He shows the wounds of crucifixion, and he eats in front of them. He shows them that he is not a ghost of any kind but the Jesus they know, the one who walked with them, talked with them, and ate with them. In this, the recognition process was like that in the Emmaus walk. The post-resurrection accounts in the gospels vary, but the differences are not too significant.

All the essentials are here:

- Resurrection,
- recognition,
- instruction and equipping, and then
- ongoing action to follow Jesus and to take the good news to others.

This good news is based on repentance and forgiveness, good news of God's love for all.

In this season after Easter, after the resurrection, the disciples of Jesus (then and now) have a time of waiting, but it is not passive waiting. It is a time of recognition, instruction, and equipping. How can the disciples share the good news unless they are clear and sure about who, what, how and why?

All of this is built on the resurrection. Every appearance of the resurrected Jesus shows his disciples that he is the Holy one of God but also the very same Jesus that they knew so well.

If the resurrection is true, the disciples will know Jesus' presence, recognise him for who he is, and know that what he told them was true. If what Jesus told them about the resurrection was true, then they must believe that everything else he said and

demonstrated throughout his ministry was also true. They must believe Jesus' teaching and reshape their lives in the ways that he taught them to do.

Our reading from Acts illustrates this well. It tells of Peter and John at mid-afternoon in the temple. They have come to pray and, as they enter the temple, they cure a man lame from birth. The people around them are astonished.

This reading has 3 parts. The first part of this reading seems very harsh and condemnatory of the people and their leaders, laying on them the guilt for Jesus' crucifixion, even though Pilate had wanted to release Jesus.

Peter then speaks of the healing and strengthening in Jesus' name of the man born blind from birth. Peter takes no credit for the healing even though he spoke the words calling in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth for the man to stand up and walk. The man does this and, in the memorable words of verse 8, *Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.* This is not solemn thoughtful thankfulness but overflowing joy.

The third part of this reading from Acts then links the people's role in the death of Jesus with the healing in Jesus' name. Peter declares that the people and their rulers did not act in malice but in ignorance. This echoes Jesus' words from the cross. *Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.* Even the worse transgressors can turn from this path so that their sins will be wiped away and, in the beautiful phrasing of verse 20, *that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus.*

In summary, *You did a terrible thing, but good things can still happen in Jesus' name. Turn away from your past and enter the joy of new life with Jesus.* This resurrected Christ, the truest image of the Father, is our guide, the one we too must follow. If this is the Christ that we follow, we must bring that consciousness to everything that we say and do and are.

Just as God and our neighbour go together in who we are to love, so faith embraced and faith enacted go together in how we are to live with God and with others. Our relationship with God is how grace works, and how we live with our neighbours is what grace looks like in our lives. That's the part that other people will most easily see. When faith and works are yoked together, we have true discipleship. If you see one of these things without the other, don't give up on that person but encourage them. They are part-way there. If that person is you, don't give up on yourself, you are on the road. Keep following Jesus and all things will fall into place. See Romans 12 for a closer look at the life of faith lived in community.

If we are to be true disciples of Jesus, we will refine our lives day by day to be more like Jesus. If we want to help others to become true disciples of Jesus, we will encourage them to also follow Jesus' example and his teaching. Eugene Peterson referred to discipleship as *long obedience in the same direction*. That is true for us, and it is true for others.

Some quotes from each of our readings:

From the Book of Acts: *You rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.*

How do you handle an accusation like that? Well, Peter tells them.

Repent therefore and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus. In summary, repent (change direction) and turn to Jesus.

If things have not gone well in your life, turn to Jesus. All shall be well.

From the Psalm: *When I was hard-pressed you set me free;*

... the Lord has shown me his wonderful kindness ... put your trust in the Lord. In peace I will lie down and sleep: for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

If things are not going well right now, trust in the Lord. All shall be well.

From 1 John: *Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.*

If you are not sure of your future with God, know that the hope you live by will not be confounded. All shall be well.

And from Luke's Gospel: *Peace be with you. ... It is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and ... repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.*

If you worry about your family and friends or others who do not know Christ, just live out your faith. Be a living witness.

Have faith, trust and hope. In all circumstances, we are safe in God's promise.

So, friends let us bring our present and future selves to Jesus, walk that path of discipleship and encourage others on the journey.

All shall be well! (Mission Praise 1149, vv. 1, 2, 3, 5)

All shall be well!
for on our Easter skies
see Christ the Sun
of Righteousness arise.

All shall be well!
the sacrifice is made;
the sinner freed,
the price of pardon paid.

All shall be well!
the cross and passion past;
dark night is done,
bright morning come at last.

Jesus alive!
Rejoice and sing again,
'All shall be well
for evermore, Amen!'

Peace be with you.
And also with you.