



Sermon

You are Witnesses **Acts 3:12-19; Luke 24:36b-48**

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Yesterday, Helen and I were guest speakers at a Parish Camp. Holy Trinity Devonport are staying out at Peter Snell Village. The theme of their camp is prayer and their Vicar asked us to speak on prayer for healing.

At the start of the morning, she read this account of the healing of the lame beggar. Helen and I spoke about some experiences of healing and introduced the basic approach we use. Then we gave them the opportunity to try it in small groups. It seemed to be new to most of the people. Several of them told me afterwards that they had been quite cynical about healing.

There were six groups of four. They tried the approach we taught, while Helen and I circulated amongst them to be on hand to assist and instruct.

In one group, a woman had had a fall which injured her shoulder and elbow. She had forgotten to bring the Voltaren to camp, so she was uncomfortable and wanting to cradle the arm. The group had a go at praying without much conviction. Then I engaged a young man with the process and invited him to pray with authority. After a little hesitation he did so, and straightaway the woman said the pain had reduced. She moved her arm around and found more and more improvement. "What do we do now?" he said. I suggested they keep praying until there was no more improvement. Why stop when you are winning?

I left them to it and continued my rounds. At the end, that lady reported there was no pain in her shoulder or elbow and that she could move her arm right up, around and even up her back – none of which she could do before.

Another lady reported she had had a numb right arm for 18 months. After her group had prayed for her, first it went cold, then she had normal feeling again. In another group, a man had prayer for damage to his leg – but he wasn't available to report on it, because he had already gone out for a run to test it!

Three other groups had little to report – however that is a 50% success rate which is not bad for anyone and these were beginners! Thank you, Lord!

After that I had conversations with two men who had been in the group which prayed for the woman with the shoulder problem. One of them was the man I just described coaching. Neither of them had expected anything to happen. Both were boggling at what they had seen. One, a Consulting Electrical Engineer, said, "It doesn't matter how it works – once you've seen it you have to believe."

They were witnesses to something difficult to understand. But it was a good thing. In the same way, when Peter and John healed the beggar at the Temple many people saw and knew something amazing had happened to the man they had often walked past.

Peter spoke to the crowd which had gathered and told them it was the power of Jesus that had healed the man. He gave testimony of the wrongful conviction, execution and death of Jesus. But also that he had risen from the dead and been glorified by God. "We are witnesses of this," he said.¹

Over Holy Week, we followed a theme of prophecy fulfilled. In Luke 24, our gospel passage and earlier in the chapter as well, Jesus said that the prophets had prophesied what would happen to him.

⁴⁴ He said to them, "Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ²

I said that I used to long to know what Jesus had explained to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus and through the forty days to the Ascension. Then I realised that the answer is before us. When they point out fulfilments in the gospels, Acts and the Epistles, they are quoting him. In Peter's speech we heard today, there is obvious quoting from what Jesus had said in the gospel passage even to the statements: "You are witnesses of these things" / "We are witnesses of this." There is a striking similarity there, so that we can infer Peter was thinking of Jesus' words.

The role of a witness is important. It is the normal way we know of distant events. Jesus gave his disciples good evidence so they could testify to the truth of his resurrection. He came among them as they were gathered together. First he had to convince them that he was not a disembodied spirit (a ghost). They were afraid of this appearance and did not know what to make of it. He gave them physical evidence by showing them his hands and feet and inviting them to touch him.

Having dispensed with the idea he is a ghost, there was another problem: it is a characteristic of our minds that sometimes we cannot take in evidence presented to us. There was a bit of that yesterday when those men saw a shoulder remobilised – can this be true?! How much more for the disciples – they were then so amazed and overjoyed at his being raised, that they still couldn't believe. Were they saying, "I just can't believe it!"

So Jesus took some fish and ate it. That finally settled their minds – he was real, physical, solid, with a body that functioned, a body restored from death, yet still bearing the scars of his death.

"You are witnesses of these things," said Jesus. And so, Peter gave testimony of what he had seen – Christ is Risen!

All Christians are called to be witnesses – to tell of our personal experience of Christ. We are not all called to preach or to be evangelists, but we are called to be witnesses.

You probably haven't seen the risen Christ physically, but if you are Christian you have an experience of Christ. Let people know there is a living God who hears you and answers your prayers, so they too have an opportunity to respond as Peter described, repenting and turning to God, so their sins may be wiped out and times of refreshing may come from the Lord.³

Just when you were thinking you couldn't do that we have help at hand!

Remember, last year we had the Hope Project which used the Bicentenary to highlight the Gospel message to the nation by placing a booklet in letterboxes across the country with TV advertising campaigns. We are about to enter Phase II of the Hope Project with the second booklet and set of advertisements. They will go out in May.

Right now, I want to draw your attention to the 10 Day Challenge. It is part of the Web follow up offered by the Hope Project to those who are curious about Christianity. It is a good idea for you to know about this resource. You may be able to make use of it when talking to someone about the faith when you want a relaxed

¹ Acts 3:15

² Luke 24:44-47

³ Acts 3:19

approach with most of the talking done for you. Again, the trademark style of Dave Mann is to ask questions so he gives you some suggested questions to ask.

You have a bookmark to help you find it online. Here is the welcome from that site.

10DC Welcome: <https://10daychallenge.co.nz/>

And this is the tutorial for you if you want to use it with a friend.

10DC Tutorial Video: Click on the link at the bottom right hand corner of the 10 Day Challenge website homepage. [TUTORIAL FOR DISCUSSION FACILITATORS - CLICK HERE](#)

Do have a look at the material – you may find it helpful yourself. You might be impacted by it and then want to show your friend. Maybe a home group would like to do it together. Maybe you would like to form a group to discuss it together.

I started this sermon giving evidence of a couple of healings yesterday and the impact on two men. We have seen that evidence and testimony is important to Jesus and he calls his followers to be his witnesses. For us to be witnesses, we do have to open our mouths. The Hope Project offers us an easy opportunity to become witnesses – please don't waste it. Please try to make use of this second great opportunity.

May Jesus bless you, his faithful witness, as you do.