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Sermon

Eating with the Risen Christ

Luke 24:13-35; Acts 2:14a, 36-42; 1 Peter 1:17-23

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It is two weeks since Easter. We are in the Easter season and our readings explore the resurrection of Jesus. Two weeks ago, we heard the account of the women going to the tomb to complete the burial with spices, only to have an encounter with an angel who opens the tomb and shows it is empty. He announced to the women that Jesus had risen from the dead. They turn to go and meet Jesus. They are full of wonder and fall and worship him. Last week, we heard of the encounters with Jesus that same evening and a week later as the disciples meet him and see that he is truly alive again with a real body. We know from John's gospel that Peter and John had seen the empty tomb and discarded burial cloths and John had believed.

Our gospel reading today, goes back to fill in some detail between those two readings. These two, Cleopas and his companion, had given up. They had attended Passover, been shocked at Jesus' arrest and horrified at his crucifixion. Then, it was the Sabbath, so they could not travel. But now on the first day of the week, discouraged and hopeless they have given up and are leaving Jerusalem.

You know the story – a stranger joins them on the road as they walk to the village of Emmaus. He asks them what they are discussing. Their conversation had not been mild or casual. The word used suggests strong debate. They know about the women meeting angels at the tomb; they tell of some of their companions visiting the tomb and finding it as the women said. But they add, "They did not see Him." They are downcast because the last thing they expect is for Jesus to rise, so these reports from Mary Magdalen and John make no sense. It is generally held that this Cleopas is the same person as Clopas whose wife was present at the foot of the cross. I wonder if his companion this day is his wife? Could it be that she is inclined to believe her friends who went to the tomb and her husband dismisses their account as foolish fancies?

Jesus walks and talks with them, yet they were kept from recognising him. He rebukes them for being slow to believe and explains to them from the scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer those things and then enter his glory. Do you hear the importance Jesus gives to the Old Testament? "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"¹ How foolish are we? How ready are we to dismiss parts of scripture we simply don't understand. Jesus calls that foolishness. He said once that every jot and tittle of the Law would be fulfilled.² That is like saying the dot over an 'i' and the accent over a letter. Jesus has a high

¹ Luke 24:25

² Matthew 5:18

value for the inspiration and accuracy of scripture. Mark Twain wrote, "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."

They reach the village and urge their fellow traveller to stay with them since it is nearly evening. He agrees to stop with them. A meal is prepared and their companion takes the bread, blesses it and breaks it. As he gives it to them, their eyes are opened and they recognise him. Jesus is alive!

It is revelation from God which enables us to believe. These two, had heard the testimony of the women seeing angels who said Jesus was alive but that did not result in faith. They were kept from recognising Jesus when he first came to them but then their eyes were opened and they knew who he was.

How did you come to faith in Jesus? Was it testimony of others? Perhaps, you had an experience of his presence in some fashion? Did your heart burn within you when you heard words of scripture? That is one sign of the Holy Spirit at work within you witnessing to the importance, relevance and truth of scripture. Maybe he was revealed to you in taking communion? We receive Jesus by faith into our hearts as we receive the bread and the wine of communion. Do you meet him there?

I chose to be confirmed when I was 17 years old because I had some experiences of answered prayer. I decided God did exist and responded by being confirmed. With hindsight, at that time, I wasn't really a Christian since I had not put my faith in Jesus as saviour, I was only affirming that there was a God. Nevertheless, I found that taking communion was meaningful to me. As I gave thanks for Jesus sacrifice, as I prayed in the pew afterwards, I would often feel a warm, burning in my heart. It wasn't medical heartburn; it wasn't the alcohol. I knew the difference and it would usually develop as I gave thanks and not otherwise.

Perhaps you have had a similar experience? Don't worry if yours is different: God deals with us all differently.

Well, these two disciples hurry back to tell the others that they have seen the Lord alive. They find them in the Upper Room. There are the eleven and some others who also have their own news. Jesus had appeared to Peter that afternoon as well.

Luke 24:33 'There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.'

At that point, Jesus appears in the locked room with them and shows them he is real, physical and the same person who had died and so the account we heard last week from John's gospel continues.

Peter's Teaching

We heard that Jesus explained the Old Testament scriptures to those disciples. Have you ever wondered what he said to them? Their hearts burned within them as they walked with him – what a privilege. Well, I think we can know what he taught them. Before the crucifixion they understood very little. But within 50 days, Peter is teaching with confidence drawing on Old Testament scriptures relating to the Messiah.

I have noticed that Peter not only reports what he has seen but clearly teaches what he has heard from Jesus. There are examples from the Book of Acts where as he is quoted we can see he is repeating Jesus' words or even actions as in the raising of Tabitha. In that case, he almost precisely follows the procedure Jesus used in the raising of Jairus' daughter.

So it is significant for us to listen closely to this foremost of the Apostles as he writes what he considers to be important to the young churches of his day. We claim to follow Apostolic teaching, well here is the writing of an apostle for us to consider and align ourselves too.

Today we get two bites at the cherry – we hear a portion of Peter's sermon from the Day of Pentecost as well as a portion from his first letter.

Who Jesus is:

Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Peter boldly proclaimed that Jesus whom they had rejected and crucified had risen from the dead. “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.”³ That is the great message of Easter – Christ is Risen: *He is risen indeed!* Peter proclaims that Jesus was shown by God to be “both Lord and Christ:” yes, the Christ, but also Lord.

Is he Lord of your life? Lord means boss or Master. When we went to England for a 6 month adventure, we thought it was to be a return trip. We enjoyed the church we joined there so much we extended our time to a year. Then we wondered about staying longer. After much prayer, I heard the question one day, “What are you doing here?”

I responded, “You told us to come.” Imagine my surprise when I heard, “Yes and I have not told you to leave!” That changed everything; it was no longer our decision, we had to wait for further instruction before we could leave. As a consequence 6 months turned into 11 years. And during that period there were times we longed to come home but we knew we were under instruction to stay. Then he quite clearly told us it was time to go back home and we came to St Stephen’s.

Sometimes people flit from church to church looking for one which makes them feel comfortable and leave immediately something doesn’t suit them. But do they stop and ask God “You instructed me to come here; has that changed?” He is in charge not us.

What has Jesus done?

Peter declared Jesus to be Lord and saviour. In his letter, he says to the Christians that they were set free from their old life which had been empty. They were part of a corrupt generation – every generation is corrupt but we see corruption increasing in our day. It used to be that murder was a rare event in NZ, now the papers seem to report it frequently.

They had had evil desires - it is true of all people who are separated from God. We have all known it. Some of us perhaps are still in that place: you search for truth in all sorts of places; you cannot pray; your prayers hit the ceiling; you are so dissatisfied with life – that is separation from God. If that describes your life – there is an answer.

The answer lies in what Jesus has done. His death on the cross was to pay for our sins – the things that separate us from God. It takes a life to ransom a life. In this case the pure life of the Son of God willingly laid down. Before the earth itself was created, God decided that he would pay that terrible price, he would take flesh; he would spill his lifeblood to pay for the offence of mankind. How did Peter know that? Because after the resurrection Jesus explained it to him.

Call:

Peter moves on to the call to action: The people were horrified as they realised what they had done in crucifying the Christ. They cried out to the apostles, “What shall we do?” The answer is so simple and yet impossible for the proud: “Repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁴

Repent means change your mind; align your thinking with God’s ways. If you find yourself reading the Bible and passing quickly over some passages – stop and ask yourself why. Perhaps you need to choose to believe that God knows best. That would be repentance.

But repentance is not just thinking – it needs to affect our actions. Suppose someone had a habit of taking stationery from work or leaving early – that’s likely to change after he submitted to Christ. The Holy Spirit highlights things that had seemed OK and then we see them differently. He might remind that person of the command “Do not steal” and it no longer is acceptable to his conscience.

³ Acts 2:32

⁴ Acts 2:37

Perhaps you know that your way of life is immoral - instead of excusing yourself, change your mind and act differently; that is repentance.

As we put our trust in Jesus' ability to deal with our sins; as we ask his forgiveness and choose to obey him, he gives us new life. It's what Jesus called being born again. It is a new life inside. Life is changed, transformed. It is exciting and wonderful. Suddenly, the separation from God has gone. Instead of knowing about him, you know him. Instead of your prayers hitting the ceiling with a soggy thud or a dull clang, you know you are getting through and sense his listening presence. You start to be aware that he is communicating with you.

Peter wrote that this new life is from imperishable seed rather than perishable. The seed for this life is the Word of God. That is another reason the Bible is so important. It is the recorded, inspired Word of God. It endures, it lives and it gives life. Remember, how highly Jesus valued it?

As we explore the Bible today, seed is being sown. Will you allow it to germinate in your heart to bring forth righteous eternal life? Don't poison the seed with scepticism, rejection and doubt. Take time to read a bit each day and ask God what he is saying to you through it. Then it will grow within you and bring forth life.

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