

**2018- 04-15 Sue Diggory**

***"You are witnesses of these things"***

**Easter 3: Luke 24 verses 36b – 48**

It is still Easter Day evening and we are still in the 'room with closed doors'

Last week our account from John's Gospel followed on from he and Peter seeing the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene's encounter with Jesus in the garden, both in the early morning of Easter Day. However, as we set the scene for Luke's account the 'two' have just rushed back after their encounter with Jesus on the Emmaus Road.

They are the two unnamed disciples who in their dejection had left Jerusalem earlier that day. Luke tells us *"that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about 7 miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened"* and that while they were chatting *"Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognising him."*

Luke goes on to say that despite Jesus taking the time to explain to the two how the scriptures had predicted that all this would happen as they walked along together they do not finally 'see' that it is Jesus with them until *"when he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them."* It is at that point that *"their eyes were opened and they recognised him,"* and then he disappears from their sight.

But they had seen enough and rather than what was I suspect a heavy seven-mile trudge away from the city we are told *"that same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem"* to tell the others about their amazing encounter with the risen Christ. As the 'two' are sharing their joyful news the assembled disciples hear these words *"Peace be with you."* They are no longer alone; Jesus is there in their midst.

Luke tells us that the disciples *"were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost,"* and just as we heard last week with Thomas, Jesus meets them at their point of need, he knows what they need, they need to be reassured and so Jesus shows them his scarred hands and feet, and tells them

*“Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”*

Then he goes one step further *“Have you anything here to eat?”* Luke continues, *“They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.”* Here was further proof that they were not in the presence of a ghost, but in the presence of a real body, the body of the risen Christ, the risen Christ who yes had a new body, but a body that was real and living. The resurrected Jesus was no disembodied spirit, nor was he merely a resuscitated corpse, no the resurrected Jesus was not and is not a ghost; he is a real person, a real person who has a new body, a resurrection body, a real person who they and we can have an ongoing and growing relationship with.

Luke continues his narrative with Jesus ‘opening’ the minds of the gathered disciples. He helps them to understand the scriptures, just as he did for the ‘two’ on the Emmaus Road so that they could see how his death and resurrection was the fulfilment of old testament scripture; *“that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled,”* the fulfilment of how all three divisions of the Hebrew Bible bear witness to Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

Now Jesus goes further as he explains that this was so that repentance and forgiveness of sins could be proclaimed in his name, in the name of Jesus, yes beginning from Jerusalem, but from now on to all nations. The promises that have been made to and through Abraham, Moses and the prophets must now begin to happen. It was now time for the whole world to be brought into the embrace of God’s saving love, it was now time for repentance and forgiveness to become universal and not just personal, now it was time for the words of Isaiah to become a reality as the resurrected Jesus becomes the one who is to be *a light for the Gentiles* and the one that *may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*

Repentance and forgiveness of sin are at the heart of the Christian faith. Yes, there must be an individual turning away from the old life and an embrace of new life in Christ, yes, there has to be a personal receiving of God’s gracious forgiveness by an individual, but there is a wider need as well, a need for these values, for repentance and forgiveness to become part of the values of wider

society if we are to bring peace and reconciliation to the troubled areas of our world, that was what was needed for example in places like Northern Ireland and South Africa, and so needed in the Middle East today.

But, I suggest the wider embrace of Christ, will always have to start with the embrace of an individual, and this is where we like the disciples have our part to play as we like them are “*witnesses of these things.*” Not, of course in the same way as they were, we have not seen and experienced the risen Christ as they did, but like them we as Christ’s followers have been given the same commission, the commission that we heard about last week, the commission to ‘go,’ to go and to be proclaimers of the good news.

Well I wonder how you feel about doing that?

I wonder how you feel about being *a witness of these things*?

Perhaps we are back to how the disciples felt when they first saw the risen Christ, startled and terrified?

Surely he doesn’t mean me, surely someone else would be better than me?

That of course may well be true; there are many gifted evangelists who are better than us, more eloquent than us, but, and how often it is that we hear that little word ‘but,’ we are all called to be witnesses, and just like the disciples we are not asked to do it on our own, or in our own strength, rather we are asked to do it in the presence of the risen Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This year our Archbishop’s, Justin and John, are asking once again that we should join them in prayer for the nine days, the Novena, between Ascension and Pentecost, to join them in prayer for lives to be changed as part of the ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ prayer initiative for 2018.

As individuals, we are asked to pray each day from 11<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> May for 5 people, to pray each day for 5 people to have their lives changed by the presence of the risen Christ, for 5 people to begin a new journey of faith.

We must all know 5 people who do not yet know the love of the risen Jesus in their lives. It could be members of our family, friends or neighbours, people we

know have yet to know Christ as we do – I'm sure some of us could come up with a long list, but 5 is what we are being asked to commit to.

This is being launched in our deanery at the Ascension Day Service in Tonbridge Parish Church at 8.00pm on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> May. This will be the last service that Mark Brown will officiate at as our Rural Dean before he steps down and it would be good to have a strong Crockham Hill presence at the service.

Changed Lives – Changing Lives is the guiding theme for this year's Thy Kingdom Come initiative – so I ask you, will you like me pledge to pray? There are more details on [www.thykingdomcome.global](http://www.thykingdomcome.global) which is on this week's Pew Sheet. Please pledge to pray for 5, and If you are willing to commit a little further please take one of the Novena 2018 Prayer Booklets which covers the 9 days of prayer. There will also be a couple of ECC, Churches together events during this time as well – more details soon as they say!

Will you pray for 5 people to know the love of the risen Christ in their life?

Will you pray for God to open your heart to the possibility of change?

Will you be willing to pray Your Kingdom Come, your will be done, in me and through me because like those early disciples we are witnesses of these things.