

What difference does a day make?

Last Sunday we enjoyed a real sense of occasion and celebration in our services. [Thank you so much to everyone who played a part in preparing the churches for the festival weekend.] We celebrated the resurrection of the Lord Jesus – the new life given by God that shows us that even death itself cannot rob away God's infinite supply of new possibilities, creativity and hope. But a week on, it's only right that we should slow our chocolate consumption, clear our heads and once again consider what difference Easter Day makes to the rest of our year.

Rather than looking in depth at a particular part of one of our Bible passages, I'd like us to look at the broad sweep of today's New Testament lectionary readings because together they show us something so fundamental, yet so easily forgotten! They show us that meeting with the risen Jesus changes everything!

The Gospel reading

In John we read about Jesus' friends, behind locked doors, frightened and what else? Ashamed that they hadn't fought for Jesus, or at least admitted that they were his followers? Utterly disillusioned, doubting God, or their own judgement? Angry at the injustice of the whole thing? Powerless? Uncertain? Worried about Mary – had she lost the plot? Or worried that she was right and that they'd missed out? Then Jesus came and stood among them, bringing the things they lacked – peace, purpose and power.

Jesus showed them his hands and his side and in his company his disciples saw the fulfilment of his teaching. In some sense his scars formed the link between all that had gone before and the reality of the moment in which they found themselves. He breathed into them the peace and joy that he had promised accompanied by purpose and power "the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father" (John 15:26). That Spirit who would enable them to go out into the world to continue the work Jesus had begun and to spread the message he had brought so that, in the words of Jesus' prayer for his disciples "the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23)."

The Acts reading

Then in Acts we see how post resurrection meetings with Jesus had impacted the way of life of the Jesus' community. Just as Thomas 'caught up' later, so as the disciples in the locked room shared their experience with the whole church they too had first hand knowledge of the transformation that had taken place. Could there be a greater contrast? Meeting with the risen Jesus had indeed changed everything! Rather than living in fear of the Jewish authorities, they were living boldly, testifying powerfully before councils and authorities, witnessing to God's creative and transforming act in raising Jesus to life. Acts chapter 4 tells

us that they shared everything, no one was in need, because God's grace abounded in their actions as well as their hearts. Rather than keeping people out, in case they were dangerous, we read in Acts 2 that the disciples were respected and that they welcomed people into their community.

How exciting it must have been! Rather like having Easter Sunday every day! Rather like heaven on earth – and that's the whole point. Jesus' resurrection had marked a turning point in history – God's kingdom is coming! Through meeting the risen Jesus they really experienced everlasting life in the here and now and that's made plain by the characteristics of their community! Maybe some of us have had the blessing of being part of such a community at some point in our life. Maybe we see glimpses of it in the generosity of our friends here, in the joy of studying God's word together, in the shared silence of prayer or the four part harmony of hymns. But for those early followers and friends of Jesus this was a total immersion lifestyle; resurrection hope changed their priorities and principles. And the same is true for today's followers of Jesus too. As John wrote, these stories are about us

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe^[d] that Jesus is the Messiah,^[e] the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

I wonder which of these stories you identify with more closely.

Are you like a disciple in the locked room? Frightened, ashamed, powerless, bewildered, feeling let down by God, or someone you love, or even let down by your own self! Then today, as we worship, and as you come forward to receive the bread and wine, Jesus' body and blood, receive his peace. Allow him to breathe a new sort of life into you, ask him for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the comforter and advocate, and take hold of the purpose and power that he will willingly give.

Or are you experiencing something of the heaven on earth that we see in the believing community of Acts? Have you enjoyed a glimpse here? That's wonderful, but let's take hold of all that Jesus' resurrection offers locally and globally as well as personally. It may feel hard to believe as we look at the news, but the resurrection shows us that everything is being renewed! God's kingdom is coming. As citizens of the Kingdom, part of God's ongoing mission, then we're called to sharing – radical, hopeful, costly sharing. What's your next step? What does that mean for us as a parish? What's our 'every member' calling as a church here and what do we need to lay at Jesus' feet this morning in order to enable that calling?

Conclusion

In a moment we'll take time to reflect on these questions in silence, but together. Wherever the Holy Spirit guides our reflections let's hold these two passages together to grasp this one, vital point: the resurrection of Jesus changes everything! The first Easter Day was not an

isolated 'one off', it was the marker that God laid down as the measure of his love and his power. Love and power that he continues to pour into his world and which will transform all miscarriages of justice, oppressed communities, lost hopes and visceral fears. Love and power that he continues to pour into his church so that we not only experience this shalom peace for ourselves, but are transformed into the human hands and feet and voices that offer healing and health into his world.