

Christ with us

Sermon at St James Lower Hutt by the Rev Derek Lightbourne April 15 2018

Keynote Bible Reading: Acts 3. 12 – 20

Our theme today is '*Christ with us*', as we are invited to connect with the events of the resurrection of Jesus. The purpose is to link the events of some 2000 years ago with Christ being with us today.

As we trace those events, from the empty tomb to the final appearance of Jesus we become mindful of the gradual transformation of the followers of Jesus from their fear and doubt to one of excitement and desire to share.

The account of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus well describes this, from their bewilderment as they walked along, a stranger joining them, and then in hospitality offered they recognise the risen Jesus. No wonder as they reflected on the miracle, their 'hearts burned within us'. They were excited and rushed back to the other disciples to share the good news.

By this time the women also had realised what had happened and were keen to share 'He has risen.' It was these and the other appearances that came to be summed up as the *kerygma* (proclamation).

As we focus on 'Christ with us' and the connectedness with the events of Easter, words of the hymn come to mind:

'See Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb
Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom.
Let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing....

No more we doubt you, glorious Prince of Life.....'

And so it was, the first disciples came to be in no doubt Jesus had risen from the dead. What a change! There was Peter who was sceptical, the women who were afraid, and Thomas who doubted. Surely as Jesus appeared, he banished fear and doubt.

As we are mindful of all this, Luke at the start of the Book of Acts summed up events of the resurrection: '

'After his suffering, Jesus appeared alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1.3). Then after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter publicly spoke of Jesus – hence the *kerygma*: Jesus had risen from the dead.

We can be grateful for summaries of these sermons in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. In his second sermon (this morning's reading) Luke describes Jesus in ways less known, yet significant. In our consideration of the *kerygma* we consider three: (as we heard in this morning's first reading)

- 1) God's holy servant Jesus
- 2) The Holy and Righteous One

3) The Author of life

First, *'God has glorified his holy servant Jesus.'* Or is that what it was – servant? The reason for asking is a question that has perplexed Bible scholars. The translation 'servant' is of the Greek word *pais*, from which derives *paidos* and for us in English paediatric - as 'child'. And this is not the only reference early in Acts. The translations generally are of this being servant with a footnote at the bottom of the page, of child. The scholars I've consulted point to Jesus identifying with the Suffering Servant of the prophet Isaiah. But could it be 'child – what if it were? My conjecture is that this passage is in the context of Peter healing the man who was lame and explaining it was faith in the name of Jesus that enabled this. I'm mindful where Jesus in the Gospels blesses children and affirms their faith is worthy of the kingdom of God: 'Let the children come to me, for of such is the kingdom of God, and it was desirous 'to receive the kingdom of God like a child. 'And Jesus laid his hands on them and blessed them'. My memory of our children at round the age of eight, in prayer they showed great faith and belief when praying, that was the time before the questioning sets in. So – it could be ...'God has glorified your holy child Jesus.'

2) Second, the *Holy One and the Righteous One.*

Holy One has associations with the holiness of the Jewish Temple and entering the 'Holy of Holies.' Indeed, it can be wider than this, I'm mindful of the holiness of creation, as God instructed Moses: 'Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.' A friend has recently been to Rakiura Stewart Island and shared an experience where when walking in the evening. A kiwi came onto the road and my friend stopped while the kiwi came alongside and brushed her leg with the feathers while she stood motionless and silent. Surely this was an experience of the sacredness of creation.

The *Righteous One* – all along Jesus has been regarded as doing perfectly what was God's will, and especially in endorsing and upholding the commandment of love. It was however unexpectedly one of the soldiers at the cross of Jesus who proclaimed: 'Certainly this was a *righteous* man.' Reflecting on this insight was John in his first letter and he wrote: 'My children...if anyone does sin, we have someone who pleads with the Father on our behalf, Jesus Christ the Righteous One (1 John 2.1)

3) Thirdly, the *Author of Life.* What a profound description: Author of Life. It is Christian belief that the Holy Trinity was present in creation thus Jesus spiritually present. St Paul in writing to the Colossian Christians ascribed: 'Christ is the first-born of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created.' The first disciples believed this also as in an early recorded prayer of Acts 4 we read in a faith-filled account: 'They raised their voices together saying, 'Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them.....'

And not to forget Jesus' own proclamation, 'I am the Way and the Truth *and the Life.*' It's likely that the writer of 'Thine be the Glory' had this in mind as he praised the 'Glorious Prince of Life, life is naught without you.....

Concluding then and summing up our Theme of 'Christ with us' and of the connectedness I mentioned earlier, I draw from today's Collect Prayer for God to 'Give us such knowledge of Christ's Presence, ...that we may be strengthened and sustained by Christ's risen life and serve you.....'

There's an outcome as we take this into our devotional life: Jesus on appearing to the disciples had greeted them 'Peace be with you.' It is that peace which you may well experience in our Sunday worship, and in quiet times. As we are mindful of this, a further insight comes from Peter's sermon: In our turning to God, 'times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord. What an encouragement from 'Christ with us.'