

## **SERMON 15.4.18 By Joy Dipple**

**Readings: Acts 3: 12-19. Luke 24:36b-48**

One of the things that are so impressive as we read the Bible is that the people whose stories are recorded, are so real. The disciples for example are shown with all their imperfections, but we also see how God is in the job of transformation.

In all four Gospels the disciples are seen as slow to develop their understanding of how God was accomplishing His purposes through Jesus. Despite Jesus having warned them about His forthcoming death on the Cross and that He would rise again after 3 days, it was difficult for them to comprehend – as indeed it would have been for us if we had been there. Jesus was talking about events out of the norm, events that don't follow ordinary rules of the natural world. To talk of resurrection was other worldly.

Now in Luke's Gospel we see the risen Christ suddenly appear to his disciples within the confines of a locked room. They had heard rumours of His resurrection and now witness it for themselves. It was a frightening experience, as I'm sure it would be for us if we suddenly saw someone who had recently died appear as large as life within a room we may have been sitting in.

Jesus has to calm them with a greeting of peace, and sets out to prove that He is no ghost, but is very much alive - asking for food to eat, and showing them the scars on His hands and feet. He was the first person to show us what a resurrected body is like, except that unlike us He carries the scars of how He died.

As we read our Bibles we know the story from beginning to end. We know how bold the disciples became and how the church was formed; but that future was unknown as these disciples first encounter the risen Christ. Once again Jesus has to point out how God's plans were predicted in their Hebrew scriptures, much of which of course follows our Old Testament. It certainly adds to our own understanding of the New Testament if we too consider the scriptures of the Old Testament that set the scene for the outworking of God's plans, for example the incredible insights of Isaiah 53 that foretold the crucifixion.

From hiding behind closed doors, full of doubt and fear, the disciples will move into mission mode. Jesus says repentance and forgiveness of sins will be

preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. It was the task of the disciples to start that process, as they were commissioned into that role.

As said, God is in the job of transformation. The disciples would be transformed, ordinary people would be transformed, and we still experience transformation now two thousand years later.

Looking now at the passage from Acts, Chapter 3, we see how Peter himself was transformed as a result of the Holy Spirit. From someone who at Jesus' trial denied three times that he knew Jesus, we now see Peter being so certain of Gospel truth that he thinks nothing of putting his own self in danger, as he spreads the Gospel message.

Jesus said it was written that 'repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem'. Now Peter, under the power of the Holy Spirit, had called on the name of Jesus to bring healing to the crippled man, and then he has a crowd of people listening to his explanation for the healing.

He really tells it how it is, no matter what the consequences would be. They had been the ones to kill the author of life, but God had raised Him from the dead. It was their fault, and now it is faith in the name of Jesus that would bring complete healing. Peter says that both they and their leaders had acted in ignorance. Now they needed to repent and turn to God, so that their sins could be wiped out and they would receive times of refreshing from the Lord. Peter had been totally transformed from fear to mission mode. Now he gives others the opportunity to also be transformed.

This is also our remit. As we are transformed so are we put into the Lord's service to transform others. It isn't just the role of church leaders. It is the role of all of us wherever God places us – in our homes, our workplaces, amongst our friends, and those we socialize with.

But it is a big ask, and the reason I say this is because if we are really serious about our faith, it is going to be offensive to some, as it was for some who heard Peter's words.

I find it too easy to avoid difficult topics. I don't like hurting people's feelings. Whilst it is vital to be tactful, it is all too easy to smudge the real issues – to avoid speaking the full Gospel truth – a truth that says it is only in the name of Jesus that we are saved. No other religion offers grace, forgiveness and the certainty of eternal life. Yet our society says all religions are of equal value. The Gospel asks us to aim for the highest moral standards

and to lead by example, but society says anything is acceptable. The Gospel is offensive, but society's religion of tolerance won't tolerate the right to be offended.

When we look at Peter's faith that God's name would bring healing to the crippled man, I can't say that I have the faith to do the same. I have difficulty in believing that God can do such stuff in Christ Church, Tettenhall Wood, and yet why not?

I would like to see all of us having a chat over coffee about these questions. It is too easy to make excuses and think God doesn't work like that in the west of Wolverhampton, but is it more to do with our own fears and doubts, and the what ifs – what if prayer like that doesn't work, what if I hurt someone's feelings?

The real Gospel truth as Peter stated in the Acts of the Apostles is truly transformative, but also extremely challenging for us in the here and now.

Do we want the wild and dangerous Gospel message in our midst, or are we happy to settle for what is safe and comfortable?

Can we really face the challenge?