

Sermon – 18th April 2021 – LUKE 24:36-48 – Revd Carol Harley

When I was reading the text from Luke's Gospel, the doorbell rang and it was a group of Jehovah's Witnesses. Now, I would imagine that most of us have had a knock on our door at some time from the Jehovah Witnesses. Each time they've visited me they were always very pleasant as well as being smartly dressed men and women, often they brought a child in tow.

Now although I am happy to discuss my Christian faith until the cows come home, I always find myself getting a bit impatient with my visitors. In meeting with these people I find they never really listen to anything I want to share about Jesus and our Christian faith. So, I politely tell them that I am a Christian Minister and want them to listen to my point of view, sadly they obviously don't want to hear it because they can't wait to get away as soon as possible!

Last time this happened I thought about what we ought to be teaching others about our faith. Surely the task of every Church member, is not to tell people WHAT to think, or even what to believe, but to encourage people to think critically of what faith means in our world today and how it should be applied.

We are called to be seekers of truth not possessors of truth. Doers of deeds and not simply thinkers of deeds.

Which brings me to our Reading from the Gospel of Luke this morning.

The followers of Jesus are grouped together probably mulling over the consequences of the death of their much loved friend and Master, and the possible repercussions of being associated with him. When suddenly, like a magic genie popping out of a bottle, Jesus appeared before them and we read that the disciples were startled and frightened – who wouldn't be!!

But then when Jesus spoke to them saying, 'Peace be with you' they at once realise this is not a ghost or a figment of their imagination, this was their beloved friend who stands amongst them, and their fears turn to joy.

And then we have this lovely scene – 'I'm starving', says Jesus. 'Have you anything to eat?' 'Yes', they replied, and once Jesus had eaten, relaxed and caught up with the news, we read that he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

Well – if only he could do that today.

The people of Jesus's day had always wanted a, 'tell us simply and clearly', kind of faith.

There have been many who have been interested in Jesus and what he had to say for thousands of years. He was often asked by the Jewish authorities, *'don't keep us in suspense! If you are the Messiah, just tell us in words we can understand – a yes or a no will be sufficient! If your answer suits us then we are happy to believe.'*

But Jesus's reply was always, *'No, I'm not going to tell you'.*

If he opened the Disciples' minds to understand the scriptures – wouldn't it be wonderful for us if he were to come into our Church Service right now, walk up the aisle, come to the front and ask us, *'do you have any questions?'*

If that were possible what would you ask? Might we ask:

'Jesus, was there really an Adam and Eve and talking serpents?'

'What about magical trees or an ark which survived torrential rain?'

OR

'Jesus, what about my friends and close relatives who are good people and work hard in their community and do good work for charity, but have no interest in the institutional Church?' 'Are they going to go to hell just because they don't share the Christian faith?'

OR

'What about the big issues of the day Jesus?'

'What about climate change?'

'Or the constant threat of terrorism brought about by extremists?'

'What's your position on these matters?'

'Keep it simple, Jesus, just tell us without being too complicated – tell us plainly!'

What would your reaction be if, after putting all your questions to Jesus, he turned round and said, *'no! I'm not going to tell you simply!'* Would we then class Jesus as a fraud – someone who simply doesn't know the answers to our questions, and maybe had never known the answers? Because that was the impression the hierarchy of Jerusalem had.

Here was, in their eyes, a young political upstart and troublemaker – someone not to be taken seriously because when asked a straightforward question – he used parables in reply.

Because of their frustration and annoyance at his attempt to evade the answers to their questions, they became so furious they took up stones to kill him for blasphemy.

If Jesus were really the Son of God surely he would find a way to explain, simply and plainly, what those in authority wanted to know. But he refused to do it. Actually that's not quite true - he did say:

'I did tell you, but you didn't believe. You have seen how I've broken the barriers between people and God. You've seen how I have accepted, in God's name, all those who you see as outcasts, prostitutes and thieves and yet loved by God. You have heard me preach about God's Kingdom and what it involves. You have seen me and you have heard me and you still don't believe!'

And here's why they didn't want to believe: Those people had wanted to be told WHAT to believe and Jesus spelt the answers in two simple commandments: 'Love God' and 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.

But that was too easy – too straightforward and it didn't suit their thinking. And so they continued with their demands. *'Give us the facts. Give us the truth. Make it plain and simple, and we will believe.'*

Jesus replied, *'I have taught you and shown you, and you still don't believe.'*

The way to true belief is not by someone telling you WHAT to believe, instead it's all about learning HOW to believe! For example: How can we know if forgiveness really works unless we experiment by forgiving? How can we know if the power of acceptance really works unless we test it by accepting? Jesus proclaimed a ministry where he expects us to think for ourselves. And that's what he shared with the disciples as recorded in Luke's version of the Gospel. Which means it's alright to ask questions, and express doubt, and probe the unknown. Christ does not tell us WHAT to think, but teaches us HOW to think.

One of the weaknesses of the Church is to preach a message where we would presume everything will be black or white – where the choices are very clear but that was never Jesus's intention or desire. He hadn't come to teach people WHAT to think, but HOW to think – not ABOUT life, but how to LIVE life.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.