

Acts 3: 12-19 Luke 24: 36b-48

There are occasions aren't there when our faith can hit a bit of a wobbly patch? Perhaps there have been difficulties in our lives when we have been very focused on our problems and have taken our eyes off the one who is nevertheless still there through the Holy Spirit. He is with us even when we have failed to acknowledge him. Or it may just be that in the busyness of life we simply get taken up with all we are doing, and we forget the God who is still alongside us. Then at some point, perhaps as a result of coming to church, we start to think again about the reason for our faith and recover our focus. I suspect that for most of us the reason for our faith is when we consider the truth of the Resurrection – that our God is very much alive in Christ.

When people first come to faith it is usually because they discover that we have a God who is really alive. He is someone who is there, whom we can talk to.

In today's Gospel Jesus suddenly appears in the room full of his disciples and takes steps to prove that he's more than a ghost – that in his resurrected body he can for example still eat food, even if he also has the ability to appear and disappear at will. He is very much alive, though his body has different abilities to ours.

One day we too will have similar resurrected bodies – when we live in the Kingdom of a new heaven and a new earth – two places that will have become entwined together; but for now our physical bodies are made for this earth alone.

When Jesus appears to his disciples he begins to prepare them for what lay ahead. He opens their minds to the scriptures that spoke of what the Messiah had to suffer – that it was always God's plan for Jesus to endure the crucifixion, but then be raised to life again.

The whole of the scriptures is of course God's story of salvation for all humanity. It is foundational to our own faith. It is our message to the world, and the first disciples had to grasp that truth, a truth they would have to relate to others as they embarked on their mission. We are here in this church today because of the handing down of scripture through those first disciples, scriptures that speak of God's reconciliation through Christ, for the whole world. We can perhaps think particularly of Isaiah 53 that speaks of the

suffering Messiah taking our transgressions on himself, so that by his wounds we are healed.

Jesus tells his disciples that repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. They were his witnesses. It was their role, and it is ours too.

There is only one ultimate answer to all the disputes and wars of this world, and that is for the world to emulate Christ, and to exercise repentance and forgiveness. We turn to Christ as individuals, but turning to Christ is for everyone, all the nations of the world.

Christ had instructed his disciples when he appeared to them, and in our first reading we see Peter and John putting Christ's words into action. In Jesus' name they had brought healing to the man who had been lame, and were horrified that the people were crediting them with special power and godliness. They had to spell it out that the healing was in the name of Jesus and that they themselves had no special powers or attributes.

As an aside, this story gives us reassurance when we pray for others. Prayer ministry has nothing to do with us as individual people. It is always about Jesus, and placing people and their needs into God's hands.

In the reading Peter uses the healing of the lame man to preach to the people in the same way as Jesus had instructed the disciples when he appeared to them. The people had formerly rejected Christ and had been instrumental in calling for his crucifixion. Now Peter calls for them to turn to Christ and he illustrates how the scriptures had been pointing towards him as the suffering Messiah. The people and their leaders had acted in ignorance. Now they needed to repent and receive God's forgiveness.

Peter and John were doing exactly what Jesus had called his disciples to do. We are here because of others who have discipled us, and now we too are present day disciples whose agenda is exactly the same – to use people's experiences to introduce them to the living God, to use scripture to back up the truth of Jesus as the Messiah who was raised to new life, and to help people turn their lives around in repentance and faith, in order to receive God's forgiveness and refreshment in the power of the Holy Spirit.

That is our role as Christians, and may it be that God will give us those opportunities to introduce others to him, the God who is very much alive and who longs for people to turn to him in repentance, and to receive his love, healing and forgiveness. Amen.