

**ST AIDAN'S UNITING CHURCH, NARRABUNDAH
AND
WESLEY UNITING CHURCH, FORREST
CANBERRA**

SUNDAY, 6 APRIL 2008 / EASTER 3

SERMON

NOTES

Readings:

Psalm 116: 1 – 4, 12 – 19.

Acts 2: 14a, 36 – 41.

I Peter 1: 17 – 23.

Luke 24: 13 – 35.

Text:

Luke 24: 31a: “Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him”.

The Emmaus Road

This passage is unique to Luke, the journey on the road to Emmaus. Emmaus is either Nicopolis or Colonia Amasa.

Cleopas cf. Clopas in John 19: 25.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 8 - 9 April 1945.

So, there a number of important factors here.

First, the limitation of the past had been lifted. The past of Jesus had become a present reality. Luke is a historian, as he tells us at the beginning of both parts of his two-volume history, the Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles (Luke 1: 1 – 4; Acts 1: 1 – 3). Yet the point of this account is that Jesus is with us. The disciples keep talking about history, about the past, about what Jesus did and taught. Jesus himself, the one who joins them on the journey, explains the past, both the distant past and the recent past, that is the past three days. Then he brings it into the present. The disciples were talking about past history. Jesus asks them what they are doing. They stood still, gazing back like Lot's wife, and were gloomy and sullen and sad. The same word for “gloomy”, “sullen”, “sad” or “dismal” occurs in Matthew 6: 16, of the Pharisees when they fast: “And whensoever you fast, do not look *dismal*, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting”. Compare this too with Matthew 9: 15: “(The words of Jesus): ‘The wedding guests cannot *mourn* as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast’”. Was Jesus now a piece of history? Even the Easter story, and its prelude

(the empty tomb), seem to be just history. Even with him telling the story, they are still sad. Then he is amongst them, and they realise it. “Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him”. At that point the full power of his whole life and ministry, and indeed of God’s dealing with humanity from the beginning, is with them. He had now come to them again, and he would be with them for ever. The historical Jesus had removed the veil of the merely historical from their eyes, and had come to them as Lord, the same yesterday, and today, and indeed for ever. **The limitation of the past had been lifted. The past of Jesus had become a present reality.**

Second, word and sacrament belong together. We meet with Jesus in preaching, and in Holy Communion, at the Lord’s Table. In his Gifford Lectures, Karl Barth said: “What we know today as the church service in Roman Catholicism *and* in Protestantism is a torso. The Roman Catholic Church has a sacramental service without preaching. But I wish to speak at the moment not for or against her, but about our own Protestant church. We have a service with a sermon but without sacraments. Both types of service are impossible”. Although this was Barth in 1938, and we have had Vatican II for Catholics, and the Liturgical Movement for Protestants, there are still elements of truth here. That is why, for Protestants, both Calvin and Wesley wished for far more frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper. **Here in both we meet Christ.**

Third, this is a time of rejoicing. The church is the body that lives in rejoicing. It is the body that lives in rejoicing just as its Lord lives with it. It is a kind of infectious joy, for all people. Because it is the joy of those who have been saved that do not deserve to be saved. It is not judgemental, but a body that gives hope. The Church is a body of reconciliation, where those who have been sad and lost become part with their living Lord.

Our identity as Christians is based on being a new creation, and a new, rejoicing community. For the same reason, the division of the churches is scandalous. **Moreover, we are witnesses for Christ, and are therefore called in a new humanity to speak only of the joy of love in these circumstances.**

Marthin Luther King Jr, martyr, 4 April
Leonard Kentish, martyr, 4 April