

Easter 3 – Sermon – 22 April 2012 - DT

Theme: “Credible Witnesses”

Passage: Luke 24: 36-48

Scripture sentence: “You are my witnesses of these things.”

Luke 24:48

Introduction

When I was looking for inspiration for this Sunday I began by talking to a few people who simply happened to be around the church office. I'm not so sure that was helpful. One said 'Not more on the resurrection!' and another said 'It makes it hard when you either don't believe in the resurrection or at best are not sure!'.

Well in the final chapter of his Gospel(24), Luke recounts six discrete episodes to provide assurance of Jesus' resurrection, of his prophetic credibility and of his continuing will to bless his followers, present and future.

- These six are - the women go to the tomb and encounter the two men that tell them Jesus has risen(vss1-8)
- the women tell the disciples of the empty tomb (vss 9-11)
 - Peter verifies that the tomb is empty (vs 12)
 - the road to Emmaus account where two of the disciples encounter the risen Lord and recognise him in the sharing of a meal (13-32)
 - the gathering in Jerusalem where they are sharing stories and Jesus comes amongst them (vss 33-49)
 - the ascension in Bethany (vss 50-55)

Examining the Passage

Our set reading for today incorporates most of the second to last account where stories of the resurrected Jesus are being shared and into that excited group Jesus is suddenly standing in their midst.

We can divide this passage into four acts in order to watch how Luke moves us towards the ending of this Gospel.

1. vss 36-40 has Jesus initially greeting the disciples with the 'the peace' and then seeing that they were frightened thinking him to be a ghost, shows them the signs of the torture he has undergone. He shows them his hands and his feet. Still the disciples doubt.

2. vss 41-43 have Jesus asking for food and eating it in their presence. We are told that in the ancient world the people believed that ghosts couldn't eat, hence Jesus does this to show those present that he is not a ghost but is real and risen! He is also mitigating the fear of those present so he can share his faith story.

3. vss 44-47 is a section of teaching. Jesus teaches them that he has fulfilled what was written about him in the Hebrew Scriptures and now he has risen from the dead so that repentance, forgiveness and hope may take on new and fuller meaning.

4. vss 48 simply calls those present to be his witnesses. This seems amazing as only a few moments ago they are described as 'startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost'. (vs 37)

Where to with all of this?!

Certainly the resurrection raises faith and everlasting life issues that for some people are easily accepted but for others are a major stumbling block in their spiritual journeying.

Back to those giving me advice in the office last Wednesday as I began to contemplate this reflection - one person said, "Tell us a good story of the power of the resurrection in some-one's life to help us." This made me think and now enough time has passed to be able to share a little of Portia Lowery or Yeung's faith journeying. Many of you have no doubt dined at Portia's Place in Kingston which was run by Portia for many years.

Portia came from Hong Kong to study at ANU. While there she met her Australian husband.

They married and had a little girl who is now a young adult.

Portia began a Chinese restaurant in Karrabar, Queanbeyan and ran this for many years. Her husband was diagnosed with cancer and unfortunately died at a relatively young age. Portia was in contact with a Christian Chinese lady who had been sharing the Scriptures with her and praying for her. My predecessor at Queanbeyan Uniting took Portia's husband's funeral shortly before I arrived there. It was not long after I arrived in Queanbeyan that I met Portia. Portia shared with me that she had recently accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour and no longer wanted the 'lucky dolls' and other things that were in her restaurant that were remnants of her Confucian background. However the other staff members wanted to keep these. Hence she told me she was going to sell the Queanbeyan restaurant and start a new one with no idols in it and dedicate her restaurant to God. This took some time to eventuate but it happened with the opening of Portia's Place in Kingston. I was duly asked to pray over this new restaurant on the opening night which was both a privilege and a challenge for me. Never before and never since have I 'blessed' a restaurant as part of the opening celebrations. Some years later I was again privileged to share in the confirmation of Portia. Her Christian faith is amazing along with her charity. She had always planned to make enough money so that she could go back to university, study theology and become a missionary. She has made the money and is currently studying theology in the UK on the way to becoming a missionary.

From a grieving widow, looking for meaning in life she found herself transformed by the risen Christ.

Hers is a modern day story that marries up with that of those present when Jesus came amongst those early disciples and changed their lives.

This is a local, true story of one who experienced the power of the resurrected Jesus.

Credible witnesses – I believe so.

Praise be to God for the gift of his Son and the unimagined joy of the resurrection for those who experience it. Amen!