

Easter Sunday – 31st March 2013 – 9am Wesley

Reading: Luke 24: 1-12 'The unveiling of the resurrection'

Text: "It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed like nonsense." Luke 24: 10 & 11

Introduction

It is wonderful having an almost three year old grandson. The questions he asks are incredibly probing especially as he has already developed a brain that wants to know how everything works, which is not necessarily my strongpoint. He is fascinated with planes, trains and helicopters and while I've been in all those forms of transport I see them as getting me from point A to point B.

He wants to know about the engines, turbines, wheels and how people get in and out and about the pilots and drivers and the consoles in front of them etc - things I overlook or simply take for granted. My daughter, Rebecca, said to me during the week, "I'm not looking forward to Easter due to all the questions about the cross and the empty tomb that Joshua will ask. I'm not sure how to answer them!" It made me realise that Easter, for many, is a struggle in their faith and the need to be able to explain everything in our society has taken away from our faith in a God who can't simply be explained away because God is God and is beyond so much of our natural humanness. Hence it was with new eyes that I re-read this familiar resurrection passage from Luke 24 and read the response of the disciples to the early testimony of the women who first went to the tomb and found it empty – "but they did not believe the women, because their words seemed like nonsense."

The barrier is to believing the unexpected, the unexplained, the work of our God who is beyond our comprehension.

Middle

The Resurrection accounts in Luke's Gospel can be likened to an unveiling of the risen Christ by those who are the witnesses.

Luke 24: 1-9 is where the women experience the empty tomb – (p 860 of the pew Bibles)

Luke 24: 9-11 is the account of the women sharing their experience

Luke 24: 12 is where Peter sees the empty tomb and leaves 'wondering to himself what had happened'

Luke 24:13 -32 is the Emmaus Road experience where two of disciples encounter the risen Lord in their journeying.

Luke 24: 33-35 is the two disciples witness to the others of the risen Lord.

Luke 24: 36-43 is all the disciples experiencing Jesus coming into their presence where he shows them his hands and feet to prove his resurrection to them.

It is a slow unveiling or revealing of himself as the risen Lord that happens in Luke's Gospel. It is also a series of stories, begun by the experience of the women at the empty tomb, who then testify to what has occurred. This witnessing to their risen Lord is crucial to the early church and is still crucial to our faith, and extending our faith so that others may believe.

I love the fact that the first to witness to the possibility that Jesus had risen were the women. In a male dominated society, yet in a ministry by Jesus which is relatively equally shared between men and women, it is the women who experience the empty tomb first and have faith that Jesus has risen from the dead.

The women who Luke identifies as Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary 'the mother of James' are the same women (although Susanna is not mentioned by name here) as those

singled out in Luke 8: 1-3 as having provided for Jesus' Galilean ministry 'out of their own resources'. They had supported Jesus and the disciples financially so they could do ministry and they have been on the journey with Jesus for a long time. Their care of and for Jesus, coming to the tomb early with spices for his body, is rewarded with them experiencing the empty tomb and hearing from the amazingly dressed two men (in the other reports they are called 'angels') who say, "He is not here; he has risen." For the women, there is no doubt about the fact of the resurrection. It is not explained 'how' but it is experienced as a fact, as deep belief which they have no hesitation accepting. What seemed like nonsense initially to the disciples is gradually unveiled as true to them as they experience resurrection encounters for themselves in the rest of Luke 24.

Reflection to broaden our Easter perspective

In the little book called 'Lent and Easter Readings from Iona' I found this reflection which I share with you. It is written by Peter Millar:

"When I was a small child, I used to think that the Easter story was a kind of 'spiritual story' in which a good God somehow overcame a 'bad world'. Or to put it another way, I thought Easter could in some rather vague way make me a better person than I was. Later in my life, when I had experienced the power of the Holy Spirit working in my own life, I realised that what had happened on that first Easter morning was that God in his love had transformed all powers of death and darkness into the powers of life and light – for all time and all eternity... I knew that Easter had both a personal and universal dimension. It was not just about 'me' – and my personal spiritual journey – it was also God's way of telling us that God was not a distant, remote God, but a God of love and power working in every situation of human experience. Binding up the broken-hearted, bringing good news to the oppressed and proclaiming a new kind of liberation - liberation from personal failure and liberation from all those man-made structures which today are robbing so many of their human dignity and worth. .. We can never 'celebrate' Easter in isolation from the cries of our world. The moment we 'celebrate' Easter in some isolated way – in our own comfortable way – we make a mockery of Christ. We reduce the message of Easter – and in that process we domesticate Jesus so that he becomes some powerless household idol. But when our hearts and minds are open to the wounds of our world today, we begin to see, in a hundreds of new ways, the meaning of the first Easter. Never just a 'spiritual' message, but something far more significant. A transforming and living God who has entered completely into the human condition." (p117/118)

Conclusion

It is so easy to keep Easter to ourselves and to our experiences but the Gospel makes it clear – the women first and then the disciples shared their 'nonsense' experiences and so others came to believe and care and reach out to others in faith. We can't answer all the questions of the resurrection, just as I can't answer all the technical questions of my almost three year old grandson. However, that doesn't matter. What does matter is that we are called to live as people of the resurrected Christ and pray for a continued unveiling of what that means for us as people of faith. We may not be able to fully explain it but may we seek to live our lives in the way of Christ.

It's like explaining to my grandson, from a non-aeronautical engineering perspective, that planes fly because they have big wings and engines that thrust them up into the air and pilots that are skilled to fly them. It becomes more complicated explaining how helicopters fly!!

May you have a happy and holy Easter Resurrection Sunday. Amen!