

Easter 3A April 26, 2020.

Luke 24.13-35

Not recognising someone who you really should recognise can be very embarrassing. It's one thing getting a mental blank and not being able to remember someone's name, but to see someone you know well and not recognise them is embarrassing, but I am afraid that I have done just that.

I remember being at a function after a big church service and introducing myself to a person who I didn't recognise, who then very quickly told me who they were with a bit of an irritated expression in their voice. They were irritated because I actually did know this person quite well. It had been some years since I had seen them, and they had changed a lot. Their hairstyle was different, they had lost weight, they did look quite different, and I just did not recognise them.

I could try to excuse myself by saying that the light wasn't good, it was in the evening after all, and they had changed their appearance quite a lot, but in the end whatever the reason, I just did not recognise them-and it was awkward. And they weren't very happy with me.

Once I heard this person's voice and their name, I recognised them immediately and I could see who they were clearly. But it took them speaking to me and telling me who they were before I recognised them. Before my eyes were opened so to speak.

Something similar seems to be happening in the gospel reading today from Luke chapter 24. Two of Jesus disciples, not among the 11, but people who were known to the 11 and part of the larger disciples group, and who would have been very familiar with Jesus, were walking along the road to Emmaus on their way from Jerusalem. The text says it was the day of the resurrection (24.13).

These two knew of Jesus crucifixion death, they had been in Jerusalem when it happened (24.20), and they had heard a story from some of the women in the disciples group that Jesus was alive (24.23-24). Jesus joined them on the road, and they talked. The text says these two disciples were prevented from recognising him (24.16).

Then at the end of the encounter as the two disciples and Jesus ate together Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them (24.30). Jesus did, with these two disciples exactly as he had done at the last supper (Luke 22.19), though, these two probably weren't there in the upper room at the time. The text says that when Jesus repeated his action of the last supper with these two disciples and gave them the bread their eyes were opened and they recognised him (24.31).

The experience of the disciples not recognising Jesus until Jesus had done or said something is a feature of some of the other resurrection events as well.

For instance, later in this chapter of Luke's gospel Jesus stood among the disciples and said, 'Peace be with you' (24.36). The text doesn't say how Jesus came to be among them, just that he stood among them and the disciples struggled to know that it was really Jesus. They thought they were seeing a ghost, and Jesus had to encourage them to look at his hands and feet (24.39)-probably to notice the wounds from the crucifixion, and he invited them to touch him (24.41), and then he asked for something to eat to prove that he wasn't a ghost.

Also, in John's gospel, Mary Magdalene was at the tomb of Jesus having discovered that Jesus body was not in the tomb, and she encountered a man she thought must have been the gardener. It was only when Jesus said her name-Mary, that she recognised him as Jesus (John 20.16).

In each case Jesus did something or said something and then disciples recognised him. Without his action first they couldn't recognise him.

Having our eyes opened so we can recognise Jesus is a great gift. In our mechanical world we are very used to having control, and we are used to things happening as we expect they will. So, we press the power switch on an electrical appliance and expect it will turn on. Faith and matters of the faith don't work quite that way. Faith is a gift from God. It can't be manufactured or demanded, nor is it the automatic result of any particular action.

I'd like to suggest there are at least three implications of this activity of God-this opening of our eyes so we can recognise Jesus.

First, we are in the Easter season and the readings from the gospels at this time of the season remind us of the sending of the disciples by Jesus-go and tell others. Go and make disciples of others (Matthew 28.10, 28.19-20; Mark 16.15; John 20.21; Acts 1.8). The ministry of evangelism is a critical one for us as disciples-to be witnesses for Jesus, to make disciples of others. And yet we often find it difficult to share the gospel with people who aren't yet Christians.

Sometimes we think that if only we knew more of the Bible ourselves, or perhaps that if we developed our spiel so we could share the good news of Jesus more smoothly, or perhaps if we knew all the answers to the hard questions we think people will ask us about the faith, then if we do all that more people will come to believe in the risen Christ.

While none of those actions are a bad idea, we need to remember that it was Jesus who enabled people to believe. It was Jesus who opened the eyes of faith so people could recognise who he was. He enabled them to recognise him and recognise him as risen. So that means an important part of evangelism is prayer-praying that Jesus will open the eyes of people who don't recognise him yet, so that they too might with St Thomas say of Jesus-my Lord and my God (John 20.28).

The second implication is a need for us to pray that we too may continue to have our eyes opened to the redeeming work of Jesus in our own lives. Pray that the Lord will continue to help us recognise Jesus acting in our life. The Holy Spirit leading us to a more intimate knowledge of God, knowing and experiencing forgiveness and love from God.

Today's reading from Luke 24 indicates two ways we can continue to place ourselves in a situation where our eyes can be further opened and encounter the living Jesus.

The first is the scriptures. The two disciples on the Emmaus road reported that they recalled their hearts burning within them as Jesus opened the scriptures to them concerning himself and his mission, his death and resurrection, the fulfilling in him all the promises of God (Luke 24.32).

The second is what we call Holy Communion or the Lords Supper, or the Eucharist-the breaking of the bread. It was as Jesus did with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus what he had done with the 11 in the Upper Room on the night before he died that the eyes of those two disciples were opened and they recognized him. Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them and they recognised him (24.31).

Somehow in the faithful studying of the scriptures and the sharing in the sacrament of Holy Communion we put ourselves in a place where the Lord in his grace can further open our eyes. This is not automatic or mechanical. I know quite a few people who are very familiar with the people but who don't yet accept Jesus as their Lord. In the same way mechanically receiving communion doesn't automatically mean that we encounter the reality of the risen Christ. However, doing those two things-faithfully studying the scriptures and expectantly participating in and receiving holy communion put us in a situation where the Lord in his grace can continue to open our eyes to him and his redeeming work.

The third implication is the need to pray that our eyes might be opened to what God is doing in the world right now. There is no doubt many, many people are suffering at this time because of COVID 19 and the restrictions that have been put in place to slow its spread. Millions of people are sick. Nearly 200,000 have died. People have lost jobs and businesses and are suffering.

And yet in the midst of that suffering God is active. God is bringing new things and new life. Communities and families are being strengthened. People are being drawn to God. Churches are reporting contact with many more people via online worship than are usually in church on a Sunday. Christians are learning to pray at home, to sustain themselves spiritually and care for each other in completely new and refreshing ways. This is not to minimise the suffering or somehow ignore it but the reality is that in the midst of this suffering God is alive and is bringing new life. It's a bit like green shoots in a burnt forest. There is no denying the damage, but among the damage there is also life.

As we continue to pray for an end to the pandemic and recovery from the bushfires, we might pray today that the Lord will continue to bring life in the midst of the suffering, but also that he might open our eyes to what he is doing. The Lord is moving in many and surprising ways and we need to have our eyes opened to see that.

The key for people as they encountered Jesus in his ministry was to recognise him as the messiah from God. The key for the disciples on and after the third day was recognising that he was risen. The key for us is in many ways the same- having our eyes open to Gods mission in Jesus for us and for the whole world. May the Lord open our eyes and keep opening our eyes to all he is doing, that we might rejoice, join in his work, and tell others that Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

#### A Prayer

Almighty and life giving God, we thank and praise you for the way you have opened our eyes to the reality of your love and presence and salvation in Jesus. We pray you open the eyes of those who don't yet see your truth. That you continue to open our eyes to all you have done in Jesus, and that you open the eyes of the world to see your life giving work in the midst of the pandemic.

These are gifts of your grace and we ask you for them in Jesus name. Amen.