

Easter 3

Acts 3 v 12 - 19 1 John 3 v 1- 3 Luke 24 v 36b - 48

This week, once again, we have a remarkable resurrection account where Christ appears before his disciples. The account follows the return of those who rush to tell their friends that they had met him on the road to Emmaus. Each of the accounts we hear and read all have their similarities and differences. This has put doubts on their authenticity and truth by many, which for us as believers is sad.

For some time now I have gone down to Bootle beach in the late afternoon or evening to say evening prayer. This has caused me to be stranded on two occasions through a flat battery when I have been playing music. Thank goodness for Tony who has rescued me. However, no matter how many times I have been, the beach is always different. No two days are the same. For depending on the weather and the tide, and how it plays on the sand and stones, the shore is always different. I have been there when the weather is wild. The rain has been heavy and the wind is blowing hard, so much so I cannot even open the door of the car. If the tide is in, the sea is at its roughest, and it roars when the waves are white and they crash onto the stones. You can hear the stones being tossed about on the beach. Or it could be raining hard but the tide is out and one can hardly see the sea let alone hear it.

Then of course, there are those evenings where the sun is starting to set but is still shining. It is then there is a silver glow upon the sea, as the sun in all its brightness is reflecting on it. One can hardly look at it through its sheer brightness. Sometimes it has been so bright I cannot see the words on the page. Then there is the sand and sea as they form patterns on the beach. As sea and sand continually change as the sea washes the beach. The patterns depend on the tide, if the tide is coming in or going out. Sometimes it is difficult to know what it is doing, as rock pools are formed both large and small, with each one becoming alive with life. Birds can be seen dipping in and out trying to find morsels of sea life which are unlucky to be found by them.

There are times I am quite alone, particularly when the weather is bad. Other times there may be one or two others, some fishing, others walking their dogs, and on the warm days there are children. You can hear their laughter as they play in the water or look for crabs and sea snails. Each of us seeing the beach from our own viewpoint and each joyfully marvelling at what it has to offer us. Even though it is the same beach whenever I go, whatever the weather, the beach is always different. Yet it is always beautiful, and always surprising with something uplifting to offer. Just like my encounter with God when I open myself up to the Spirit of the Lord.

Surely this has echoes with the resurrection. Jesus presented himself on many occasions to his friends, disciples, and those who knew him when he was alive. To some he gave instructions to go and tell others. To Peter he instructed him to go and feed his sheep. To Thomas he said put your hand here. Each encounter would have been seen through their eyes, and with their emotions, so surely each would have reported their experiences as it happened to them. It is no wonder that there

are so many different stories. They all had a different marvellous tale to tell. The encounter with the resurrected Christ was unique and personal to them, just like the beach is unique each day. It also would mean that each person would respond as God called them.

Yet as Jesus came to the disciples, so surely he comes to us too. To know God for ourselves will always be a personal encounter. I know there are many people who have a genuine dramatic conversion experience. For others, the realisation of God and all that means, is a slow revealing of something quite profound. There is no way better than another. Just as the sea washes ashore and new patterns emerge so God changes us, ready to meet the living Lord. It is entirely by the grace of God. What matters is that we know God and our response to our Lord's love.

Our opening ourselves up to God is a bit like prayers at Bootle beach. There may be times we may think we are talking to ourselves and our prayer is dry or stormy. Just like those times when the rain is coming down and the sea is so far away one can not see it, it does not mean it is not there. So it is with God, just because we can not feel God, does not mean God is not there with us. Other times our prayer time may be quite beautiful and will take our breath away. Nevertheless to meet God is our life blood even when it is hard and difficult, or wonderfully simple. To have a relationship with God I believe, it is both our joy and our Lord's. Mother Julian says, "I am the sovereign goodness in all things. It is I who teach you to love. It is I who teach you to desire. It is I who am the reward of all who truly desire it."

When Jesus was with the disciples he tried to prepare them for his death but also for their new life without him in the flesh. He also left them with the Holy Spirit that would aid them. I believe Jesus is no different with us now, in this day and age. As he helped his followers when they felt abandoned, so he will help and prepare us for our future. It need not be grim. The disciples did new things, remarkable things and so can we. It has been a hard year. We are told there is light at the end of the tunnel. That may be so, but a tunnel is dark and many of us in that darkness have drawn close to God almost by necessity. I pray as we come into the light we do not lose sight of God and walk even closer to the one who will help us. A great deal of healing will need to be done and it is God, the greatest of all healers that will give us the wisdom to do it. We have to marvel at the beauty of all that is and all that is possible with God the ever changing map of our experience.

God bless you all

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