

Third Sunday of Easter

A sermon preached at the parish church of St Andrew Guernsey by the Rector, the Very Reverend Tim Barker, on Sunday 15 April 2018

Readings: Acts 3.12-19 and Luke 24.36b-48

It is absolutely right to be joyful about Easter; to be deeply thankful for the promise of the possibility of eternal life, lived in relationship with God who loves and cares for us enough to send his Son Jesus to live amongst us and to die - so that we can live. That is good news. Indisputably good news.

But it is also overwhelming good news. Too much to take in. We need time – perhaps a lifetime - to absorb and process Easter and the consequences of what we have heard. We need time to work through our doubts and our questions, at our own pace, without any sense of guilt that we are still coming to terms with what this means for us.

We need look no further than the disciples for help.

It took time for the women who came to the tomb in the early hours of Easter Day to appreciate and understand what had happened.

Last week, we heard the story of Thomas' encounter with the risen Jesus. Thomas is unfairly saddled with the title, 'doubting Thomas' but he was simply a man who needed to have things clear in his mind. There is no question that he had faith and confidence in Jesus – more than some of the other disciples in some of the other gospel stories. And it was Thomas who took the good news about Jesus to India, where the Mar Thoma Church is a living witness to Thomas' faith. But he needed time to be clear about what had happened to Jesus. Only then could Thomas work through the implications of Jesus' resurrection for him.

In short, resurrection is not easy for human beings to comprehend. It goes against the grain of everything we have learned.

St Luke sums up the strange turbulence of emotion, when he describes the disciples as 'disbelieving and still wondering' in their joy at seeing Jesus, just after they have heard the news from those who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They could not get their heads around what they were seeing. They still could not fully appreciate what had happened.

And so Jesus take a piece of broiled fish and eats it in the presence. Broiled, by the way, is a method of cooking that exposes the fish to direct heat: I love the detail that Luke provides, which, somehow, earths this amazing experience.

And so the disciples are forced, by this all too real encounter, to rethink this whole experience – to rethink how they understand what God has been doing.

Therefore he who shows us God
helpless hangs upon the tree;
and the nails and crown of thorns
tell of what God's love must be.

Here is God: no monarch he,
throned in easy state to reign;
here is God, whose arms of love
aching, spent, the world sustain.

Canon Bill Vanstone explains the mystery in words that make sense to me – and I hope they these words will be helpful to you.

God loves us so much that he comes amongst us in Jesus – in the incarnation, Jesus' birth at Bethlehem. That is a radical step which takes our breath away. Are we surprised that the climax of this expression of love is equally remarkable? Jesus is not simply resuscitated. He dies. And he is alive again, living out the incarnation for all eternity, in ways that the disciples can experience. There are few things more demonstrable of life than eating. As the disciples watch Jesus eating the fish, Jesus draws them, and us, into his eternal, ceaseless life.

The story of the disciples' doubt and uncertainty is told so that we can have the possibility of the same faith as the disciples when we, like them, have worked through our own doubt and uncertainty – and have the confidence to proclaim, with the disciples, the good news of forgiveness and life.