

Easter 3- 14<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

Acts 3:12-20; Psalm 4; 1 John 2:15-17, 3:1-6; Luke 24:36b-48.

Another Sunday in Easter, another reading about the resurrection. So far, we have heard from Mark, John and now Luke.

Today's account from Luke seems focussed on proving that the resurrected Jesus is not a ghost or spirit (the Greek word is *pneuma*). Luke portrays Jesus at the dinner table many times in his gospel - it is important to note that this is the only time he goes out of his way to say he is actually eating something. Luke wants to make it clear that Jesus is not a figure of the disciple's imagination. As with the account last week from the Gospel of John, the mention of the wounds from the crucifixion demonstrates continuity with the historical Jesus.<sup>1</sup> This is the one who was crucified, but is now resurrected.

This reading comes at the end of Luke's Gospel after the story about Jesus' appearance on the road to Emmaus and is less well known than that account. Having established his resurrected identity, Jesus goes on to teach the disciples in a similar manner as he did on the road to Emmaus— unpacking the scriptures for them to show he is the one who was promised.

Turning to the reading from Acts, it is important to remember that Acts is not simply a record of what happened to the early church. It is also not the only "Acts" book written in the first centuries after Jesus died – there are the Acts of John/Paul/Andrew, to name a few. The book of Acts we find in the canon is likely to have been written in the late first century or early second century. Many of the stories in these books of acts seem to embellish the events that follow Jesus' death – hero stories, almost their own genre. Today's reading depicts Peter talking in the temple after he had healed a lame man. This reading taken on its own is difficult, as it seems Peter is criticising the Jews. The fact is that Peter's Christian context was Jewish, so given the 'genre' (so to speak) of Acts, we have to consider that the text may reflect the narrator's bias rather than giving an historical account of what happened.<sup>2</sup> The healing of the lame man had been carried out in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and it causes all to react with wonder and amazement. It is in this context, before this audience filled with wonder and amazement, that the reading for today is set.

I recently heard someone say that they thought the Acts of the Apostles should be called the Acts of God. Acts tells the story of how the apostles went on to enact and embody the mission and witness of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> It is in the name of Jesus that the healing takes place, and it is in response to this witness that the wonder and amazement happens. This passage speaks to an audience filled with wonder and amazement and "asks all of us, whoever we may be, not to repeat Rome's crucifixion of Christ. We, like those before us, are most complicit in evil when we act in ignorance (3.17)."<sup>4</sup>

Of course, both Luke and Acts were written by the same author and in the two readings we heard today have some common threads. Firstly, that Jesus is the one foretold by the prophets and secondly the theme of repentance and forgiveness of sins. In Acts, the speeches of the apostles don't link salvation to Christ's death. The crucifixion is a tragedy. "Jesus death is what makes people realize their guilt before God (since he died even though he was innocent). Once people recognize their guilt, they turn to God in repentance, and then (God) forgives."<sup>5</sup> As we hear in the Gospel reading for today, it is after the resurrection that

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<sup>1</sup> By the Well, podcast for Easter 3. <https://bythewell.com.au/episodes/b217-easter-3>

<sup>2</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher, in *Feasting on the Word Year B Vol.2*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2008. P.408.

<sup>3</sup> By the Well, podcast for Easter 3. <https://bythewell.com.au/episodes/b217-easter-3>

<sup>4</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher, in *Feasting on the Word Year B Vol.2*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2008. P.410.

<sup>5</sup> Bart Ehrman. Blog post: Did Luke have a doctrine of the atonement? Accessed 13/3/2024 at <https://ehrmanblog.org/did-luke-have-a-doctrine-of-the-atonement-mailbag-september-24-2017/>

repentance and forgiveness are to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> This is foretelling the events in Acts as Jesus tells the disciples “You are witnesses of all these things”.<sup>7</sup> Of course the author of Luke, goes on to tell the story of this witness and how the good news of the kingdom spread to all nations through the book of Acts.

One last thing to keep in mind is the idea of repentance. I have spoken about this before, but I think it is always worth the reminder. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*. Whilst in English this might mean “the sorrow or contrition that a person experiences because of sin, the emphasis in *metanoia* seems to be more specifically the total change, both in thought and behaviour, with respect to how one should both think and act.”<sup>8</sup> In the Bible, repentance is more about turning to God, than about being sorry. The word repent always makes me think of a man with the sign “repent, for the kingdom of God is near”. I think it needs a re-brand. Perhaps it could read “turn towards God and see the signs of God’s kingdom in our midst”. Encountering the kingdom really does involve a whole change in thought and behaviour. Alongside the repentance or turning to God, Luke’s Jesus offers a radical model of forgiveness: even as he was crucified he said ‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do’.<sup>9</sup>

I talked last week about what the experience of the resurrection gave the early church and continues to give us. Things like wanting to encounter Jesus as others have, living loving, generous lives, understanding that God bring life through unexpected methods, and understanding that the way of the kingdom is more powerful than the worst the world can do. Perhaps today we can add on the transformation of our lives when we follow the resurrected Jesus, as we repent and turn to God, of our role as witnesses and apostles.

This ‘meme’ caught my eye on April 1<sup>st</sup>. We can laugh that someone printed the sign wrong, but one author reflected that the banner conveys the Gospel message beautifully: “Ultimately what matters is do we experience transformation and holiness in life because of our following the way, teachings, and example of Jesus or not? Many of us do experience such wholeness and healing because of following the way of Jesus and we do have transformation stories of resurrection/new life in our lives as a result. (...) The point that Jesus was trying to convey is for us to realize that the truth of his teachings can't be killed and we get to experience new life, second chances, and hope that's tangible and evidenced in our very lives.”<sup>10</sup> The author went on to say he was glad Chris was living a risen life.

Way to go Chris 🍌🍌🍌



As we declare **Christ** is Risen, we should also consider how we experience new life. What transformation stories of resurrection or new life do we have in our lives? How are we risen in this Easter season?

Christ is Risen, Alleluia! He is Risen indeed, Alleluia!

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 24:47

<sup>7</sup> Luke 24:48

<sup>8</sup> LOUW & NIDA: Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains (Louw & Nida) 1989. United Bible Societies. Entry 41.52: μετανοια.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 23:34

<sup>10</sup> Roger Woolsey, accessed on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/nxVr55uWbwoDAJ2b/?>