

# 30th April 2006 Easter 3 B

## Rebecca Newland

Readings:

- Acts 3:12-20
- Psalm 4 page 225
- 1John 2:15-17, 3:1-6
- Luke 24: 36-48

Text of readings is available at <http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/BEaster/bEaster3.htm>

### Know Jesus

*Lord may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you now and always.  
Amen*

The message of the Easter season, those 7 Sundays between the resurrection and Pentecost, is about how the story of Easter makes a difference. It is a time to think about what Easter means in terms of how we live our Christian life. One of the things we hear a lot about at the moment is the importance of the mission of the church. We have been having another conversation about it here just recently when the Bishop came to discuss our mission plans. The diocese has been having an enormous push in the last few years to raise the profile of mission and by mission they mean mission here in the Canberra-Goulburn diocese. Our synods and clergy conferences have been full of it and it is not about missionary work overseas. It is the church's mission right here in our own backyard. In fact one of the reasons I went to the Philippines recently was to learn how the Anglican Church in the Philippines went about doing mission. They have a particular model that is quite simply wonderful, at least to my way of thinking.

Mission is a word that gets very mis-interpreted by non-church goers and churchgoers alike. It has old connotations of missionaries setting off to convert the heathens and wrecking local cultures in their wake. I heard some pretty appalling stories of what missionaries from many different denominations had done in villages we visited. It made my blood run cold and made me ashamed to be associated with Christianity as a world faith. We hear the word missionaries and our minds can quickly turn to fundamentalist evangelists who do not honour diversity and difference and we get a bit twitchy. That type of picture certainly does not fit St. Philips. We are all a little nervous about the word but the original sense of it is that it is the mission of God we are talking about. As Gods servants we are the players in a great cosmic story of creation, redemption and healing. It is the great universal story but it is also the story of our own lives, our own seemingly insignificant lives in this place and time. It is the story of our hearts and minds that are redeemed and transformed. In these stories we all have a part to play as individuals and as a community of believers.

Yet theology like this often leaves us more perplexed than ever. I mean how do you do mission? How do you know you are doing the right thing? How do you do mission with integrity, that fits in with your communities' values and beliefs? Does mission mean we have to convert everyone we think is on the wrong path? Who has time for all that anyway? It's enough just getting to church on a Sunday let alone anything else? How do we know what it is we are meant to do?

To get some insight into this we can look into the gospel reading for today. When we read scripture it is always important to try and discern the reality underneath the symbols, the words. The words might have been written 2000 years ago but they point to a timeless reality. If we look in the passage we pick up some vital information about this whole mission thing. It is information that is echoed throughout the New Testament. It is information that helps us answer some of those tricky questions about the what, how, when and who of mission.

The information really points to a process, a process

that we bypass at our peril and the peril of those around us. Let's just go through the gospel reading and isolate what happens. Jesus comes upon the disciples who are terrified and confused about what has happened to him. They think he is a ghost. He shows them his wounds and finally eats a piece of fish in front of them. This silences their fears – he is human, he is one of them, he is safe to be around. They realise they know him. They recognize that it is truly Jesus, their friend and teacher. He then opens their minds to understand the Scriptures and they finally understand what part he has had to play in God's great plan for creation. Jesus then commissions them to carry on his work and they do so. The process is a movement from fear and uncertainty, to knowing Jesus, to having minds that are open, to joy, worship and ultimately action.

For the disciples and us the key to that change, from doubt and fear to action is knowing Jesus.

Knowing someone can mean many things from a simple case of recognition to a deep intimacy and closeness with the person. The disciples had both those things with Jesus. When they saw him eat fish like a normal person it was not just a recognition of his humanity – oh he is human like us – it was a recognition of the centrality of his being in their lives. This was the man they had broken bread with, drunk wine with, argued with and loved. This was the man whose teachings had transformed their lives.

From this place of knowing their minds were opened and they understood the story and they understood what it was they had to do. This knowing Jesus is critical to the work of the disciples. It is knowing that opens hearts and minds. It is a knowing that forms the basis of their preaching and teaching all through acts. It is not just a knowing of the facts about the resurrection; it is the knowing of a person, their mission, their purpose. Knowing that intimately and knowing how life transforming, how healing Jesus ministry was and is. It is knowing Jesus so well that the disciples were united with his power and energy.

In the reading from the book of Acts Peter explains why he has been able to heal the crippled man. It is by faith in the name of Jesus. Now just saying the

name of Jesus will not make any difference but knowing Jesus, being united with Gods will, through Jesus Christ does make the difference. As Jesus himself reminds us just because we do things in the name of Jesus does not mean we know him and Gods will. Our knowing must be something beyond mere recognition and the calling on a name to invoke some cosmic magic. Our knowing must be deep and grounded. John, the New Testament author who perhaps has the most developed understanding of being at one with Jesus, writes to his readers that the followers of Jesus know him and he knows them. They abide in Jesus, in an intimate understanding and relationship. If they abide in Jesus, know him in this way, then they simply cannot fall into sin.

So before we can carry out the mission of God, the work we are called to do, we must know Jesus – we must abide in him. Know him intimately and well. The language of the New Testament is that we must repent, turn to Jesus, and enter into new life with him. We don't just turn around and say "Oh that's that bloke that got hung on a tree and was supposed to have died and come back to life". It is a turning to Jesus, becoming face to face with him and making him the centre and focus of our lives. It is then through Christ that we come to wholeness, healing and purpose.

Sandy's nephew.

I find this story of Sandy's nephew inspiring on many levels. It also resonates with my own story in some ways. The conversion and the new life that comes from that is beyond belief, beyond your wildest possible dreams. And this new life is maintained by continuing to turn to Jesus, to know him in our hearts and minds. The spiritual disciplines of prayer and meditation are central in this journey. The unity with fellow Christians who are on the path of knowing Jesus is also critical.

The answers to all the questions and doubts we have about mission, where we should be heading as a community, how we can carry out the great commission that Jesus offers us, begins in this one idea – knowing Jesus. Knowing him in heart and mind. Knowing him in suffering and joy, fear and doubt, new life and eternal hope.

May we know Jesus in the breaking of the bread and in the hearts of each other and may we preach the message of resurrection now and always.

Amen