

The Parish of Bardsey with East Keswick

Sermon

Sunday 14 April 2024: Angela Hannafin

Good morning and welcome to our Sofa sermon for today. On this second Sunday of April, we join Luke's gospel.

³⁶ And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said. ³⁷ But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!

³⁸ "Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? ³⁹ Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do." ⁴⁰ As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet.

⁴¹ Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he ate it as they watched.

⁴⁴ Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. ⁴⁷ It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.' ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of all these things.

In this section, we're just homing in on one part of the narrative. If we read the whole chapter, Luke would be telling us about what happens in one whole day. It starts early in the morning, when Jesus' tomb was discovered empty by Mary and Peter. Later on, two of his followers walked to Emmaus, accompanied by Jesus for most of the journey, but they didn't know it. Once they realised it was him, they came back the seven miles to Jerusalem to tell the disciples, only to find that they already knew Jesus was alive through Peter. We rejoin them here at the moment that they are pooling their stories of that same day, and Jesus appears to them.

The Parish of Bardsey with East Keswick

Sermon

Frightened to see Jesus, they think he is a ghost. I'm reminded of one of the great comedy shows which has recently ended on television - Ghosts. All five seasons are available on Iplayer. The main comedic tension is with the group of ghosts who live in the house, and the human occupant who is the only one person can see them. There are two distinct worlds and two distinct communities – the human (normal) world and the spiritual (ghostly) world, which the whole joke of the series is based around. Luke is very keen to remind us here, that whilst Jesus has been supernaturally raised from the dead, he isn't a ghost. Ghosts don't visit their friends. Ghosts don't say 'peace be with you'. Ghosts don't have bodies which can be touched. Ghosts don't eat. Luke wants to let us know that Jesus has been fully raised to life and is human.

For the early church, this text would have been extremely important. After Jesus died, there was a growth in Gnosticism in the early church – a view that the spiritual world is important and that matter, everything physical, was evil. To counteract that view, Luke is showing that physical things are important. Ghosts don't touch people or have hunger, like Jesus does. John's gospel emphasised the locked doors – and how Jesus suddenly appeared. Luke wants to show us that everything God has made has value, and that we have value too.

Isn't it understandable that the disciples would be frightened to see the risen Jesus suddenly amongst them. I find his response slightly lacking in compassion. "Why are you frightened?" "Why are your hearts filled with doubt?" It seems he is surprised by their reaction. We might want to shout out in their defence – who wouldn't be worried? But he seems to think that they should have understood his teaching, his miracles, his death and his resurrection. And yet, they clearly didn't. Jesus then reiterated what had already been said before - that everything written about him in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled. The crucial phrase is in verse 45. "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures". We're reminded of what happened on the road to Emmaus earlier that day, when Jesus opens their eyes and they later talk about how their hearts were burning. Jesus is helping them understand who he really is.

What is the point of this narrative? How does it speak to us? I think it's all about faith. The disciples had seen Jesus, and they believed his words and teaching, but even after the resurrection they couldn't understand. Jesus must have been constantly frustrated by how slow it was for them to get things. It needed his explanation of what had happened for them to have that 'aha' moment and realise what he was saying, even though they had

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Sermon

seen all of the steps. Jesus had to tell them that they were witnesses of everything he'd done – did they not even realise this? You know, I think the experience of the disciples is our experience. Their fear, doubt and disbelief is no different to ours. Faith is a journey. It's our response to God's invitation to be with him. It's a series of steps towards God as we grow in our relationship with him. It is the ability to trust God and rely on him. Like tea bags, our faith is most released when we're in hot water. But sometimes, we are just stumbling along, trying to make sense of the confusion of life. For many of us, faith has been a long journey, of sudden moments of enlightenment when Jesus has picked us up, time and time again, to enable the penny to drop and for our faith to grow and for us to see exactly what God has been doing in our life.

Jesus is with today and still asks those questions about the fear we still carry and the doubts in our hearts. Why are you frightened? And why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. Is it not enough to see the Risen Lord and know the true extent of his life? Today Jesus invites us to again to follow him. Will we respond to his call to go beyond our own doubt and put our faith in him again? Will we allow our minds to be opened so that Jesus can dwell in them? Will we accept Jesus' offer of hope new life, healing and a future? It is up to us to respond to him. AMEN.