

Reflection for Sunday 18th April 2021

Luke 24: 36-49 Acts 3; 11-19

Should we erase the marks?

We are at that time between Resurrection and Pentecost, the time where Jesus continues to make himself present to the disciples and followers, affirming the sense of what his ministry really meant and the impact it would have on the life of the people; yet the big difference during these encounters - as we saw last week- is that Jesus bears the marks of the cross, those that have not disappeared. This is what “identifies” him. This is how they ‘recognize’ him.

This was picked up by “Christian Art” which sends out images according to the church liturgical calendar, to help people on their journey of faith. Last Monday it was a striking image, powerful in its simplicity, and disturbing at the same time. It is a pencil drawing by an artist called Jessie Boston, which was done in 2016.



It presents us with a crucial question – why the Resurrection, which was such an important act of God’s love, did not erase the marks of the cross, such a violent form of torture and death? And even if the reading today is very similar to last week’s, even if taken from a different Gospel, it confronts us with the way we live our faith...

Why would we want to erase the marks of the suffering of Jesus? Where do we encounter the Resurrection? Would a clean and antiseptic vision of faith be a real one? Do we go about erasing the complicated, the difficult, the painful, the uncomfortable? Or even a more crucial question – *can the community of the resurrection (that is us) live as if “that” had never happened?* What would a community that erases the marks of suffering have to say, that would make any sense at all, to the suffering world and all those suffering in the world?

This is what the early community of believers had to deal with, and which we too must face. That drawing above, is a simple, even if a challenging image of what our witness is all about.

Luke sets the scene with the return of the travellers on the road to Emmaus, and the excitement this caused, and while they are telling the story, Jesus appears to them and again we hear the words we heard last week: “Peace be with you” and what we read is that this only frightens them more, so Jesus then says “**look at my hands and my feet, it is I myself**”. And then he asks for something to eat and explains all they need to hear, and their minds were opened. And the reading closes with words of sending: “You are witnesses of these things; I am going to send you...” And this has been the case ever since, we too are witnesses of the broken body, still bearing the marks; we too are witnesses that must include the story of pain, the marks of the nails, AND the hope of new life. We cannot be a community of the resurrection without referring to those marks, and this is what will make our witness real, credible and life changing.

So let us turn to the reading in Acts, written by the same author of the Gospel of Luke. At the beginning of chapter 3, Peter has healed a person who was lying by the Beautiful Gate, who has been crippled from birth, and now he can walk. This amazes everybody, because they recognize this man as the cripple he was, and so just as Jesus can show the marks of suffering, this man will always be a reminder to the people of his previous situation. And as a response to the people’s amazement, Peter tells them that it is only through Jesus that this person is healed. This man will always be a sign of God’s willingness to love.

This man who all his life was rejected by society, because his condition was considered a true sign of sin and punishment, can now live a fulfilling life. It is not only the healing but the full restoration of life. And in our world today we see and know of many who can only sit around hoping for something to happen that will change their situation – migrants, refugees, people condemned to live in the street, the homeless, the unemployed, those who are physically challenged, those who have been expelled from home and/or church for their sexual orientation, victims of domestic abuse...so many people who wait – wait to be recognized as people, people who are suffering, who wait for somebody to say something, do something. Their brokenness reflects the brokenness of Jesus’ body.

Jesus with marked hands, feet and side sends us out, so our faith as community of the resurrection should happen both inside the church and outside...not in the sanitised version of faith but clearly the brokenness of who we are, guided by the One who still bears the marks that led him to death and sends us out where we encounter those who need us to care, and to show God’s love in the transforming sense of what Peter does and says.

We are on this journey and will continue to work on this, as Jesus says: “It is I myself”, my question then is how the world will discover that this is true and how we can show the world that we believe it to be the truth. Our calling should continue to be for inclusion and justice in society and our communities; we welcome the resurrected Christ, wounds and all, or as Peter seeing the man by the gate and responding, and surprising the people. It is in our hands to do this. Let us keep going, seeing, recognizing and doing. And let us keep doing this together.

Collect for this Sunday –

Wounded God disabled and divine: give us faith to perceive you pierced and embodied, standing here among us feeding us forgiveness, beautifully broken; through Jesus Christ, the suffering servant. Amen

(Prayers for an Inclusive Church)