

Cathedral Matins 12th May 2019 *2nd May 19*

Ps 114; Isa 63.7-14; Luke 24.36-49

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

It had all gone horribly wrong. This motley band of men had given up so much to follow Jesus. But through his prescient teaching, his inner holiness and his miraculous signs, they had come to believe he was the One who would restore Israel – the Messiah who would deliver God’s people from Roman occupation and oppression, as Moses had delivered his people from the tyranny of Egypt. But on Friday, just 2 days ago, they crucified him, and buried him. A crucified Messiah was a failed Messiah. Their hopes were crushed. Judas had hanged himself, and the eleven of them that were left were bewildered, grieving, disappointed beyond measure and, perhaps above all, they were terrified.

Perhaps they would be found guilty by association? Would Caiaphas’ men come for them too?

But there were rumours. The women had gone at dawn to Jesus’ tomb, to anoint his body the moment the Sabbath was over. But when they got there, the stone had been rolled away and the body of Jesus was gone. The story got even more improbable – they said they saw angels who told them, *Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen.* Mary Magdalene even claimed to have seen him!

But the men did not believe them. What nonsense! Women were unreliable witnesses. The dawn light can play tricks on your eyes, and when a loved one dies, maybe you long for them so much that you sense their presence still with you, almost tangible.

So Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself, with John hard on his heels. They too found an empty tomb - but the broken, bloodied body of Jesus was gone. What to make of the rumours now?

It was early on the first day of the week, and there was work to do – fish to catch and families to provide for ... but I can't imagine they got much done. They must have been totally preoccupied with the disquieting turn of events. But the rumours only spread. That same evening, as the bewildered disciples met together, Cleopas and his companion rushed in, telling them that Jesus had walked with them on the road to Emmaus, and they had recognised him when he broke bread.

Could it really be true? Can the impossible be possible? And then – there he was. Jesus himself stood among them and said *Peace be with you... Look at my hands and my feet ... It is I myself - touch me and see.*

It is I myself, said Jesus. Yes, he spoke the familiar words of comfort; he explained the Scriptures to the Emmaus travellers in the way he had done before, and he broke bread in the way they knew. But his body was changed. He had flesh and bones, yet he could pass through locked doors; he appeared and disappeared at will, and was recognisable, or not, as he chose. The risen Jesus ate the food which they gave him, he conversed with them and he invited them to touch him.

Look at my hands and my feet ... touch me and see.

Scripture does not tell us what happened to Jesus' other mortal wounds – his back ripped open from the flogging, his shoulders dislocated and the tendons torn, his side pierced and his scalp punctured with thorns. Perhaps those wounds were visible too. But Jesus asks his disciples to look at the marks of crucifixion in his hands and his feet – to look at his scars and touch them.

We might have supposed that when God raised Jesus from the dead on the first day of the week, on that first day of his new creation, he would mend all those mortal wounds, and give Jesus a perfect, unmarked body. But not so. The scars on his hands and feet showed his disciples it really was Jesus, whom they had seen crucified only 2 days before. The scars showed them that Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures.

And the scars showed them that our wounds are always with us, and yet can be redeemed. All our injuries, our hurts and our pain are part of our life – part of who we are. God does not erase our history, nor our memories of what has happened to us. But in revisiting the place of trauma, in touching the scars, we can step into the power and hope of the resurrection - the new embodied life which it promises.

The disciples had wanted a new Moses who would deliver God's people from cruel oppression. But God knew that the real slave-master keeping the human race in bondage was our sin – our perpetual entrapment in cycles of flawed and hurt behaviour. At Calvary, Jesus led God's people out of this slavery, and now calls us to go with him on a new journey of repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name – a journey which changes the world.

St Teresa of Avila said *He has no hands now but ours, no feet but ours*. We are Easter people, but we live in a Good Friday world. Perhaps it is from our deepest wounds that we bring God's presence most authentically to others.

When Jesus sent his disciples out into the world to establish his kingdom, he sent them with the empowering gift of his Holy Spirit - the gift of his own presence with them always. And he sent them with all their scars.

In 1919, in the aftermath of the First World War, Edward Shillito wrote this poem:*

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;
In all the universe we have no place.
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.

If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;
We know to-day what wounds are, have no fear,
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

We stand to sing hymn number **107** (Good Christian men, rejoice and sing!)

**Jesus of the Scars* by Edward Shillito 1919