

Third Sunday of Easter      26 April 2009  
By Reverend Susanna Pain

Luke 24:36b – 48

If you have read the paper, watched television or listened to the radio this week you will have seen and heard many stories – stories of war, of courage, of loss of friendship. I have been moved to tears several times this week. Today we hear another moving story.

Embodied

Incarnate – Jesus body tells the story ‘peace be with you’ he says.

Jesus presents his hands and feet – his woundedness – marks of authenticity and they recognised him.

Eating a piece of fish – they recognised him.

Hearing his story – they recognised him.

Where do you recognise Jesus?

Seeing woundedness, what do you recognise?

Eating and drinking, what do you hear, what do you see, what do you taste, what do you smell, touch?

Three questions

- Who do you eat and drink with?
- What stories do you hear?
- Where do you recognise the risen Jesus?

This week I have seen many people, have shared meals with many people. The small group who meet for lunch after meditation on Tuesday this week spent time discussing our new Spirituality Centre, Breathing Space to be launched in June. We shared ideas for a discernment group, a journaling group to reflect on life’s journey together – beginning next term. There was excitement, authenticity – Jesus was with us.

Wednesday was the Tikondane dinner. Our small table shared experiences of Africa. We then listened to Elkie telling us stories of Tikondane – how they run education courses for so many, their new goats for milk – to sell to the villages, how they are rejuvenating the soil with manure ... stories of the head man, and so much more. There was excitement, authenticity, care for the poorest. We recognised Jesus was with us; in our eating and drinking and sharing stories.

I could tell you more and more

    Wednesday lunch

    Thursday home group dinner ...

Sometimes it is difficult to recognise Jesus with us. His embodied presence in our daily lives – in the eating and the drinking and the stories. There is joy and also disbelief.

William J. Bausch writes

*'Ministry to others and for others really begins at the intersection between God and God's people revealed in their stories and conversations.'*  
(in *Storytelling, Imagination and Faith*, 23<sup>rd</sup> publications,  
Mystic, Connecticut, 1996, p 62)

If we enter into the stories and conversation there is mutuality – not us and them, but we. There is a well known story of Damien. There came a frightening moment when he put his foot into the hot water after a futile day's evangelizing and felt nothing, the unmistakable sign of leprosy. That Sunday he got in the pulpit and did not begin with his customary 'You lepers' but with 'We lepers ...'. From that point on, his unsuccessful ministry is electric, fruitful beyond his wildest dreams. He has now entered their conversation. He is their story and once more a word has been made flesh however leprous, and dwelt among ordinary people.

*'The gospels are a response to a very bewildered first generation of Christians who were suddenly bereft of the presence of one who held them together healed their rifts, and mended their spirits. They were desperate for comfort, or some kind of contact with Jesus. So they did what we would do- and do do at the death of a parent or friend: they sat around the table and asked the original witnesses to tell them once more the stories and deeds of Jesus. And in the telling, as in all good stories, they sensed his presence again. The spirit of Jesus was rekindled. And this wasn't hard to do for the witnesses. There was much to tell and Jesus was a fascinating person. So the stories began – and so did the faith. That's how the faith got started: in storytelling. And that's what's recorded in the gospels: stories of and about Jesus and the impact he made on people. The whole Bible is story.'* (p. 22)

*'So, the Bible is a storybook, relating to us in a lively and accessible idiom. The biblical stories illumine the areas of human experience and show us possibilities. Indeed, the biblical stories go further and invite us to live out those possibilities. This is the area of grace. This is why the sacred stories reveal to us the face of God.'*

*Somewhere along the line, that face of God took on specific human contour in the face of the Man from Nazareth. In fact, as a convenient transition to the next chapter, we might say that Jesus himself is all that God wants to say in his story; that Jesus himself is God's Story - Word in the flesh:*

*God, as everyone knows, created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. And, as we are now aware, he created them through the use of words, for words, or course, are power. "Let it be done" God proclaimed, and it was done. And everything he made was good.*

*Well, God was especially proud and loving of the man and woman he made because he had breathed into them a part of himself, his spirit.*

*But, not surprisingly, the devil was jealous and angry. So one day when God was enjoying the man and woman, the devil casually happened to walk by. He sauntered up to God and asked him what he liked so much about these creatures. And when God opened his mouth to speak, the devil craftily put a*

*bond upon his tongue so that he could not speak! God could not talk! And since God's creative power was in his words, the devil had bound that power.*

*The devil laughed at God and quite had his way with the man and the woman. Well, as some eons went by, the devil came back to mock God – he couldn't resist, such as is his nature. Well, he came back to mock God. He scoffed at the silent deity and taunted this helpless God. God responded to all this by holding up one finger.*

*"One?" asked the devil. "Are you trying to tell me that you want to say just one word? Is that it?"*

*Yes, God nodded, pleading with his soft eyes and urgent hands.*

*The confident devil thought to himself, "I don't suppose that even God could do very much harm with one word. OK." So the devil removed the bond from God's tongue, and God spoke his one word, in a whisper. He spoke it for the man and the woman and it brought them great joy. It was a word that gathered up all the love, forgiveness, and creativity God had been storing in his heart during the time of his silence.*

*The word he spoke was Jesus! (p 115, 116)*

Our new Bishop, Bishop Stuart has been moving around the diocese listening to stories – stories of people's faith journey. This week he listened to Nikolai, Jill and me. I was moved to tears by Nikolai and Jill's stories, by no means simple or straight forward. When it came to my turn we were running short of time. I asked Bp Stuart to ask me three questions, so I could truncate my story.

The first question he asked was: What enabled your journey to leadership in the Christian community?

Second: Who has inspired you?

Thirdly: What 'floats your boat'? In other words, what is your passion, what excites you?

(To each of course, I told a story. If you are interested in the answers, make a time, and ask me.)

To the third I answered 'prayer', because prayer is what connects us to God, listening, sensing direction, asking, speaking, thanks ... and I am passionate about helping others to find their prayer ...

Finally he asked 'How can I serve you' as your bishop?'

I thought for a while, then invited him to be himself – who God has called him to be, because as I see it Christianity is a journey to wholeness – praying, listening to God's call, being true to ourselves and not distracted into becoming something we are not!

*The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams has reminded Christians that belief in God is about living in the reality of faith and the unselfish life, and not about opinions or philosophical proofs.*

*In his Easter sermon delivered at Canterbury Cathedral, Dr Williams identified St Paul as an early example of someone living the brave reality of*

*faith, putting his life at risk for the sake of his belief and witness to the resurrection:*

*“It’s worth remembering that Paul of Tarsus joined the Christian community not as a well-meaning religious enquirer but as someone who had been the equivalent of a terrorist gunman, someone who had supervised the activities of a private militia devoted to abducting and imprisoning members of the Christian sect. He is a perfectly intelligible figure in the back streets of modern Beirut or Baghdad. And he has to find his ‘heaven’ by going, undefended and unvouched for, to the people he has been trying to silence and kill. Can anyone live like this? If the Colossians or Corinthians or Philippians had asked this, at least Paul would have been able to say yes: I have lived it, or, it has lived itself out in me and in those who were my victims.”.....*

*“When all’s said and done, the call is to every one of us. We need to hear what is so often the question that’s really being asked when people say, ‘How do you know?’ And perhaps the only response that is fully adequate, fully in tune with the biblical witness to the resurrection is to say simply, Are you hungry? Here is food.’” (Anglican News, May 2009 edition p15)*

And I would add, look here are my wounds. Let me listen to your story and let me share mine.