

3rd SUNDAY OF EASTER ESSENDON 2021
MISSION & RECONCILIATION FOR ALL
Lk 24.35-48 AA 3.13-19 1Jn 1.11-15

We now move from Mark to John to Luke, in accounts of experiencing the presence of the Risen Jesus, not quite the conclusion of Luke's Gospel, as he waits a further 40 days for Ascension, but here is the final commissioning of Jesus' disciples, as they at first gather in fear, anxiety and confusion, before moving to faith and joy at the realization he is truly risen and present with them. Then there is the promise of the Spirit providing continuity into their future mission to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth, rounding off Luke's theme of universalism or catholicity, that all are welcome to respond to his message.

The early stages of Christian worship are reflected here, with the Scriptures being explained and the bread being broken as the Risen Jesus resumes table fellowship with his followers as friends. In John's account, we have Thomas up front with his initial doubts, but then leap of faith, as he accepts that Jesus has risen, and now Luke has the broader group of disciples moving forward in faith.

From the start of this new mission, there is a sense of expansion and enthusiasm, so that the journey of faith continues, and is to be shared with all encountered along the way, without exclusion. Luke is said to have been of Greek background, and medically trained, but it's clear his priority here is a commitment to proclaiming the Good News of Jesus, and, then, like Paul, moving on, beyond the other evangelists, to writing of life in the early church. He is concerned about the practical side of how Christian life is to be lived in community, as described in Acts of the Apostles, as the journey continues to Rome and beyond.

And, as Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, let's remember it took nearly another 300 years, with much persecution and suffering along the way. Then, it could well be argued historically, that this turning point in 312AD led to a tainting and often enough, a corruption of the message of Jesus, as Church and State intersected and became enmeshed to an unnecessary degree! Nevertheless, the fundamental message remains valid and practical for all ages, that love of God and neighbour are necessarily linked and at the heart of Christian discipleship.

Once again, however, when we look at history and human nature, things clearly went wrong along the way, with misinterpretation or ignorance of this basic principle leading to so much misunderstanding. What would Jesus say about the many divisions of Christianity over the centuries, and the wars fought in its name, from the dogmatic debates of the early centuries, to the Crusades, to conflicts within Church and State, the Eastern and then Western Schisms, or splits, the Reformation, and ongoing issues to this day. So often, Christianity has been tied too closely to the dangers of nationalism, sometimes with underlying overtones of ethnic superiority and racism, which then over-rides any broader understanding of the Gospel message of love and peace. Isn't it extraordinary how the waters of Baptism seem sometimes to run only skin deep, as someone once put it?

As we heard last week, the ideal was to share resources and possessions, so that no-one would be left behind, or in need of the physical necessities of life, as well as responding in faith to the spiritual dimension of faith in prayer and communal worship. The first greeting of the Risen Jesus is *peace*, followed up by words of forgiveness and mission to the ends of the earth. And more is the pity, that that message of peace has so often been lost or forgotten, or even openly rejected. Jesus surely wasn't just talking about peace among the believers, either, but about a more subtle application of an attitude of tolerance and understanding, and leading along the path of peace by example, at home, in one's local community, and beyond.

Jose Pagola expresses the Easter message thus: *"At the very moment when Jesus feels that his whole life is being lost forever, as is the sad fate of all human beings, God intervenes to give him God's own life. When everything is ending for Jesus, God is beginning something radically new. When everything seems irremediably lost in the absurdity of death, God is beginning a new creation... In raising Jesus, God begins the **new creation**. He comes out of his hiddenness and reveals his ultimate plan, the purpose for which he first created the world: to share his infinite happiness with humanity."* As for the disciples and the resurrection, he says: *"All the sources tell us that what they went through not only revived their faith in Jesus, but opened them to a new and surprising experience of his presence in their midst... The core of the (Gospel) stories is a*

personal encounter with Jesus, full of life... Jesus came and stood among them.” Here is the starting point of the Christian mission, of which you and I are now part, as we continue our Gospel journey of life.

Recently, I came across a lovely poem titled *Focus on Love*, which reflects on the spirit of this season we celebrate together in faith; *God spreads love around as the sun kisses the day with autumnal warmth. Apt since this Friday is called Good; not because of the suffering nor the death since we still have plenty of both. Instead we ought to focus on the love of God for the world and each of its inhabitants. This act of love and integrity. This act of love that spoke the truth to power. This act of love that did not resist violence. This act of love whose seeds give birth to light, liberation, wholeness.* And so we move in faith from the darkness to Easter light and joy, with a commitment to reflecting that light and joy in our own lives, as a response to the call of us all, to mission and outreach, with a spirit of repentance and forgiveness.

john hannon

18th April 2021