

Reflection for April 18

Easter 3

We are still very much in the season of Easter. The dramatic events of Jesus' arrest and trial and then the agony of his crucifixion followed by the joy of his resurrection are all fresh in our minds. We can imagine the turbulent state of the disciples' emotions. Their leader, Lord and King, is dead, taking with him all their hopes. 'We had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free'(Luke 24 v21). Leaderless and frightened they shut themselves away. There was so much they did not understand about the events and the things that Jesus had told them about the scriptures and the predictions they contained. The disciples saw Jesus as King, the promised Messiah who would deliver Israel as King David had done.

"They missed him. They were looking for a lion; He came as a lamb and they missed Him.

They were looking for a warrior ; He came as a peacemaker and they missed Him.

They were looking for liberation from Rome; He submitted to the Roman stake and they missed Him.

They were looking for a fit to their mould; He was the mould -breaker and they missed Him.' (A Bucket of Surprises - J. John and Mark Stibbe)

The reality is that the Jews, including the disciples, had largely failed to take in the prophecies of the scriptures or understand Jesus' words about what would happen to him, all of which ran counter to their expectations. Psalm 22 predicts how the Messiah will be treated. In Isaiah chapter 53 we read 'He was oppressed and treated harshly. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter'. Similarly verse 5 reads ' they led him away to his death.' The disciples had failed to understand what Jesus told them during his time with them- ' I will be put to death, but three days later I will be raised to life' (Mark 16 v 24). In Mark 10 v 33 Jesus said, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, when the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and teachers of the Law. They will condemn him to death and then hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock , whip him and kill him, but three days later he will rise to life.' In Mark 14 v 29 we read ' But after I am raised to life I will go to Galilee ahead of you' This confirmation of Jesus' resurrection reinforces the declaration of Psalm 16 vv8-10 'He will rise from the dead.'

Another important strand in these predictions is that Jesus must suffer (Luke 9 v22) 'the Son of Man must suffer....He will be put to death, but three days later he will be raised to life.' The same message appears in Acts, in the words of Peter speaking in the Temple ' God announced long ago through all the prophets that his Messiah had to suffer (Acts 3 v 18)

The prediction of death and suffering are things that the disciples , particularly Peter, cannot accept. When Jesus talks of his death and suffering Peter rebukes him ' God forbid it ,Lord,' he said.' That must never happen to you (Matthew 16 v23) . Jesus ' response is clear and to the point ' You are an obstacle in my way because these thoughts of yours don't come from God, but from men.'

It is vitally important that the disciples should understand what Jesus is doing and why. They have to accept his resurrection and believe in the risen Christ. His appearance to Mary Magdalene (John 20 vv 11-18) to the woman (Matthew 28 vv 8-10), to Peter (Luke24 v 34), to the two on the Emmaus road (Luke 24 vv 13-34) ,to all the disciples (Luke 24 vv 35-42), by the Sea of Galilee (John 21 vv1-23) all serve to leave no doubt that Jesus is alive. When he appears to the disciples after the resurrection he goes out of his way to convince them that he is no ghost but alive, by showing them

his hands and feet and by eating a piece of fish. At the same time he continues to teach them and develop their understanding. 'Jesus explained to them the passages which referred to himself in every part of the scriptures' (Matthew 24 v27) and later ' He opened their minds to understand the scriptures' (Matthew 24 v 25)

Jesus convinced his disciples, and others, that he had risen from the dead. He opened their eyes to the meaning of the scriptures and , crucially, to the reality of his presence. 'He sat down to eat with them, took the bread and said the blessing , then he broke it and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him.'

They were full of joy and wonder and were ready to go out and spread the word of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection and give the message in his name about repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all people. 'Go then to all people everywhere and make them my disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey every thing I have commanded you' (Matthew 28 v 19)

We are commanded to do the same and, like the disciples, we must know the scriptures, recognise the sacrifice that Jesus made, ask His forgiveness, know his love and offer it to others with joy, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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