

Our reading from the book of Acts begins with Peter saying 'I now realise...'

He was prone to impulsive behaviour and speech, however by the time we reach his visit to the Gentile house of Cornelius at Caesarea, Peter and the other disciples have had time to reflect and understand.

I now realise...

He goes on to say that he's realised God does not show favouritism, God accepts everyone from all nations.

I'm sure we've all made some blunders in our time and acted impulsively.

Mr. Bakimci, a Syrian lorry driver was heading for Gibraltar, Spain and that's what he thought he'd entered into his sat nav. When he arrived at Gibraltar Point, a nature reserve in Lincolnshire he too could have said...I now realise...he was 1,600 miles away from his destination.

A lady went with her extended family to Disneyland Florida and she left them in a queue for a ride and went to get her drink asking her husband to save her place. He was a middle-aged thickset kind of guy in dark grey shorts and blue T-Shirt.

Walking back to the queue after getting her drink she sees her husband from behind and realises he has a hole in his shorts at the back, the seam had split. Walking up behind him she sticks her finger through the hole and says, did you know your shorts were split.

An angry middle-aged lady dressed identically to the woman's husband turned around. Some explaining was needed. I now realise...!!!

St. Peter now understands so much more, not only of what the life and death and resurrection of Jesus meant and how it tied in with all the OT prophecies, but how the grace of God was for all people, not just Jews but all nations.

If each of us took a moment, we too could probably say what it is we now realise that we didn't appreciate or understand before.

It may be that your experience is something akin to the famous story of the lost son who took all his wealth, went far away, spent everything, ended up destitute and came to his senses. I now realise...I realise what I had and threw away.

Or like my spiritual hero Brother Lawrence who devoted himself to the practice of consciously living in God's presence and despite this bringing great joy and benefit still went through 10 years of thinking he was damned and would never be received by God.

It came to him that it was a lack of faith and after that point he was no longer troubled. He too could say, I now realise that it is by faith in God I am set free.

Where is God leading you? What is God doing in your life? Is there some turmoil and uncertainty. It's not an easy place to be but God will see you through, have faith!

Our faith evolves. We grow in faith. What is it you are beginning to realise?

The contrast to the mature reflection of St. Peter in Acts is the hurried confusion of the Gospel of Mark.

It was the first Gospel to be written and it's clear that the book has structure but it is brief and rather hurried and

rather chaotic, not least the account of Easter Sunday morning.

I want to think of four characters in Mark's gospel and we'll start with Peter.

In Ch14 Jesus says you will all fall away for it is written, I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter.

Peter replies Even if all fall away I will not / Even if I have to die with you I will never disown you. (The others say the same) but then Jesus then predicts that Peter will disown him three times.

And he does, and it cuts him up. It nearly destroys him.

At the resurrection the angel tells the women Jesus message and it's to be conveyed to the disciples and Peter. We know from Luke 24:34 that Peter also met the risen Jesus but we know nothing of that meeting – I love that Jesus sought Peter out on resurrection morning.

Later on Peter is restored and re-commissioned to lead the church.

Realising the truth about ourselves is one of the most challenging things we'll ever face, but God never leaves us broken as if for no purpose.

Through his love and compassion we are renewed and restored, forgiven and reinstated. Time needs to pass but we too can say I now realise who I am and what I can be like BUT, by grace I am being made whole.

He takes the broken and he makes them whole. That's Peter's story.

We often skip around the person of Judas in the Easter story. He's not a good example of anything and he's presented in the Gospel in a negative light.

In Mark's gospel he carries out his act of betrayal and then just disappears from the narrative, nothing about what happened later.

On Good Friday we shared some of the reflections from the book Walking the way of the cross. Archbishop Stephen Cottrell writes his reflections as if he, and we had been disciples.

Here's the thing. If Judas hadn't betrayed him, someone else would have. Everyone was anxious. Everyone knew that things had to come to a head. So it was like he wanted someone to hand him over, and we got to thinking that maybe if we did – if someone did – then this was the chance he needed to show people who he really was. So we didn't get in the way.

But it isn't working out that way. So it is convenient to dump the blame on Judas, even when the truth is far more complicated, far more uncomfortable.

Because I have betrayed him.

I have betrayed him in a thousand little ways by all my acts of egocentric self-promotion; by my failure to love, and by my refusal to wash feet; because I want things my way, not his.

Judas act of betrayal is very stark but we too have betrayed and cannot separate ourselves from letting others down, sometimes rather badly.

My clergy colleague Wendy Bradley once preached about Judas with the conviction that even he found forgiveness.

Matthew 27 “he was seized with remorse”. In her own gentle and persuasive way she won us round to agreeing that there was forgiveness for Judas, even though he couldn’t live with himself for what he’d done.

His “I now realise” was just too devastating. I’d like to think we might hear from him one day to say “I now realise how great is the love of God. Even I could be forgiven”.

My third character is Mary from Magdala who with another Mary and Salome bought spices to anoint Jesus body. This alone tells us they had no belief in or notion of resurrection.

The disputed end to Mark’s gospel tells us Jesus appeared to her first. Not Peter. Not his mother. Not the beloved disciple John. Mary. What could she say?

I now realise he’s alive – not from any mature reflection or long study, she met him.

Ultimately, it’s through an encounter with Jesus Christ that our lives are transformed. Our darkest depths (and Mary had known the dark) are places he brings his light. She met him and so can we.

My last character is the disciple Thomas and I’m cheating because he’s only mentioned once in the list of the 12 disciples. What we know of him is from John’s gospel. Unlike the others who meet Jesus, he only hears about it, and he can’t believe. He can’t make the leap of faith it’s too fantastical.

Jesus appears to him and says “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

We haven’t seen but we have believed although sometimes we need help in our unbelief. We are very like the first disciples. We can be impulsive, we can let each other down. We can fail to understand God’s purpose, we can disagree and forget the command to love each other.

To us Jesus has trusted himself and the good news of the love of God, forgiveness and life to the full.

On Easter day there is hope for us, because if we’re in that uncomfortable turmoil, or our faith is low, or we’re struggling to believe, we only need to look at the empty cross and the empty tomb.

I now realise ALL things are possible, for the one who overcame death.

Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 31 March 2024