

1 JOHN 3. 1-7. LUKE 24. 36-48. ST. NICHOLAS 9.30 AM - 19.4.15. *Third Sunday of Easter.*

How often have you been out and about and someone has said hello to you and then launched into some memory or event that you have quite obviously shared with them at one time but for those first few minutes you're scrabbling around in your mind thinking I should obviously recognise this person but for the life of me I can't remember who they are. Then the light dawns as you look more carefully, perhaps past the greying hair, the few wrinkles, a little extra weight perhaps or their mannerisms and speech, yes of course it's so and so from school/work or wherever.

Recognition is the theme that runs through the Gospel reading today. Luke's passage today begins with the return of the two disciples from Emmaus. They had begun their journey disillusioned and downcast at Jesus' death. They met a stranger, listened to him and invited him in for a meal. The stranger, as they later realised was the risen Christ.

They return to the other disciples who must have been feeling agitated and full of doubt. When Jesus appears they don't recognise him immediately. He shows them his wounds, asks them for food. They give him a piece of broiled fish which he took and ate. Then when the truth finally dawns and recognise him they must have been overjoyed. This was no ghost. This was Jesus Christ, the same but different.

This passage stresses the reality of the resurrection. The risen Lord wasn't an hallucination or a phantom. He was real. Jesus who died is risen. This is what Christianity is founded on.

Where do we find the risen Christ? Like the disciples, we find him when we are disillusioned, in loss, in our fears and doubts. Jesus is present with us always.

The cross was part of God's plan – where we see his eternal love, where our sins are forgiven when we are truly sorry for our wrongdoings.

Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit was sent to them.

What about our Christian presence in the world? Do people recognise something different in us? We are the Body of Christ. Teresa of Avila reminds us that Christ has no eyes, ears, hands or feet now but ours. This means that you and me, all of us need to be showing something of God's glory in our lives. It's hard work striving for this.

We are called not only to tell people about Christ and what happened two thousand years ago, we are to show his transforming presence in our towns and communities. Of course it's really important that we show to each other God's love, but it isn't just for us the Church. It's for everyone and we need to be working in our community not necessarily preaching but just being, allowing God's love to be shown through us.

This is a pretty tall order and we can't possibly do this on our own. In Christ we can be part of a risen presence that's fully alive – body, mind and spirit.

In the passage from 1 John 3, John writes “see what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.” Another translation tells us “what love the Father has lavished on us”. We are children of God – what a statement! With all our limitations and faults, God calls us his children. We don’t know exactly what Christ will be like when he comes in glory at his second coming, but we, the children of his Father will be like him. What an incentive to holy living now as we strive to show people what God is like.

There are opportunities in life to show people what God is like. In the past we have hosted Celebrating Codsall weekend ending with a Songs of Praise service on the Sunday evening. This was really well attended and the whole atmosphere of the service was wonderful.

We hosted a Big Lunch as part of the celebrations of the Queens Jubilee. This wasn’t only for church members – it was for anyone and everyone to come and bring a picnic and to share in various fun things during the afternoon. The afternoon ended with a short service. This event was well supported by church members and members of the community as we shared in fun and fellowship. Every two years we have the Christmas Tree Festival. We have beer and carols, the Good Friday service in the village. These were and are really good opportunities to show God’s love in the community.

Sometimes people may feel awkward or feel threatened by walking into church for the first time. We can’t just expect folk to come to us here in church to join us. If we as a Church can go out into the community to show them that we’re not as strange as they may think – what wonderful witnesses for Christ we can be.

The title of our Lent course this year was Mustard Seed stories and we watched and listened to the stories of several Christians in Stoke who saw a need in their community and did something about it. There was one lady who worked with prostitutes in her community. A fireman made it his business to do something so that a chaplain was available in fire stations.

One man spoke about meeting people at their point of need – weeping with those who weep. Not solving problems or taking away questions but simply being there for people in the midst of life’s pain. One lady, a Baptist minister started to visit the local pub and joined with the folk group there. She says that going to the pub is part of her calling, ministry and mission. She talked about being available and being vulnerable.

All of them recognised a need and felt that they were called to fulfil a need in their community. They took a huge step in faith and trusted God and He guided them and supported them.

Can I read you a paragraph from one of the handout sheets we used in the Lent groups?

“It’s important to remember that we don’t engage in the needs, dreams, and pains of our communities so that they will become Christians; rather we engage in the community because we are Christians. We don’t serve to convert, but we serve because we have been converted.”

You know in Jesus' time there weren't church buildings, Jesus and then after his death and resurrection, the disciples went out into the countryside to take the Good News.

With the help of the Holy Spirit our capacity for loving and for God will increase and we will feel more confident and able to take God's transforming love into our community.

Let's never forget - we are Easter people.