

Introduction

I'd like you to imagine what it would have been like to be one of the first twelve disciples, called to follow and spend three years in Jesus' company. You've travelled round the country with him, seen amazing things, heard the most amazing teaching and learned to tell others about God's love and to heal the sick; you've even cast out demons in Jesus name and seen God answer your prayers.

Life has been amazing, exciting, quite frightening sometimes but this man Jesus has transformed your life. It is Passover and you have come with him and the other disciples to Jerusalem for the festival. That was exciting too. You arrived in Jerusalem seven days ago and the crowds welcomed him like a king, waving palm branches and singing psalms of praise to him. – but it suddenly became very frightening and confusing. The Jewish leaders were very hostile and Jesus was arrested, tried by a kangaroo court and executed in the most appalling way. It's not all that safe following him and not at all safe to be known as one of his followers.

In fact when he was killed most of you ran away and hid. You went back to the room that you had all been using and locked yourselves in just in case any one came to arrest you as well. Then today the most amazing thing happened some of the women went to the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid to carry out the ceremonial washing and anointing that hadn't been done before the burial and they returned excited and breathless. The body had gone! At first you thought that it had been stolen, that this was one more awful thing to bear but they were insistent, no he had risen from the dead and had actually spoken to Mary Magdalene. Peter and John, too, had been to the tomb and they were convinced the story was true. He had risen from the dead.

Now, It is evening, you are all together in that place where just three days ago you had shared that final special supper with him. Two disciples who lived outside Jerusalem and who had travelled back to their home in Emmaus have just returned full of excitement. They have met the risen Lord on their journey and have hurried back to tell you all about it and Peter too, it seems had met with the risen Lord and has his own story to tell.

You don't know what to make of any of this.

Some of you are exhausted, worn out with the emotion and fear of the past few days; tired and at the end of your resources.

Some of you may be feeling ashamed – you had let him down when he most needed you. You failed him and he didn't deserve it.

Some of you are overwhelmed with grief and loss. This dear friend who you have learned so much from and received so much from is dead, gone, snatched from you before time. You can scarcely believe it – none of it really seems real.

Some of you are afraid. Worried about the future, what is going to happen now? What does the future hold for you? You feel insecure and uncertain. Life is not as it used to be and you are worried and fearful.

Some of you are physically better than you have ever been. Healed, by Jesus from sickness, paralysis, blindness, deafness or released from spirits that had held you captive. Now he was gone would this healing continue? Would you remain whole and strong?

So many questions, so many uncertainties!

And suddenly you become aware that Jesus is there, standing in the midst of the group; very much himself – yet not the same at all. He still bears the signs of suffering. He shows you the wounds in his hands and feet and that awful gash in his side. He eats – fish and bread to show you it really is him and no ghost. Yes he is very much himself. His presence still has the ability to calm you, to fill you with peace. You know now that no matter what happens he will give you the strength to cope with it. You are filled with joy. It overwhelms you and you want to sing and shout with happiness. The Lord is here. He is alive. Nothing had the power to finish him and he has defeated death and the power of evil.

Then Jesus says, "This is what I told you about when I was still with you; everything must be fulfilled that was written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the psalms. Then, as so often before he sits down with you all gathered around his feet and he takes you back through scripture. Pointing out where his suffering and death had been foretold, showing you that this is how it had to be because in this way he has finally defeated the power of the devil and death also has been conquered.

He then goes on to tell you that you have a job to do. You have been a witness to these things and it is now your job to speak about all of this starting here in Jerusalem but also through the known world. You are overwhelmed by the task but again Jesus reassures you. He says, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. Jesus wants you to tell others of all he has done but he is going to give you the power to do it. He will go with you in this new and exciting phase of your journey of faith.

Readings
Acts 2, 14a, 22-32
John 20:19-29

The risen Christ the healer

Thriplow/Shepreth

The past three years have been very challenging for all of us. We have experienced life as we have never known it before. As we have come to terms with the pandemic and now the cost of living crisis we have felt frustration, anxiety, fear, grief and loss just as the first disciples did and we have experienced the events of that first Easter Sunday in a new way.

Jesus stands amongst us now in his risen power. He comes bearing the signs of all that he went through for us. He is wounded but also totally whole. He comes bringing healing and new hope. He comes to meet us in our weariness, our sense of failure and guilt, our weakness, our grief, our anxiety, our hopelessness, our physical pain and suffering and he breathes his peace and his Spirit into us to bring us healing and a new beginning.