

The Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton
and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

Sermon 18 April 2021, third Sunday of Easter

Reverend Irene

Luke 24: 36

Christ is Risen – He is Risen Indeed!

Yes, we are still in Easter, a season which spans the 50 days from the Resurrection to Pentecost and the stories we're hearing in our readings celebrate Jesus' appearances to his disciple to show them that he has conquered death. They are bewildered yet overjoyed as they realise this is what he has been telling them would happen all along. To use a modern expression, they are "buzzing" at the news that Jesus is alive and they can't wait to spread the news of each encounter with others. In today's Gospel, Jesus surprises them yet again as they were talking about him, they even thought he was a ghost!

But Jesus is calm and reassures them, "Look at my hands and my feet, see it's me, touch me, a ghost doesn't have flesh as I have." He then takes it one step further by asking for something to eat, a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it in front of them – ghosts don't eat. Jesus says, You have been witnesses to all these things, I told you they would happen, and he reminded them of the scriptures. Their job now was to spread the word among others.

Jesus' body was transformed through the resurrection, and the whole point of Easter is that we should be changed too. Like the first disciples, we too should be "buzzing" at the joy of the resurrection, and the promise of salvation it brings, and use that buzz to change ourselves in order to change the lives of others.

Our reading from Acts also takes place after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter and John, continuing Jesus' work, have miraculously healed a lame man who hadn't walked for years, yet through faith, he was able to get up, walk and even leap in the air. On the surface, this is just another story of healing, no bad thing, but it is more than that.

The healing is the bait to draw us in; even though the story is one of reality and eye-opening realism, Peter has more to say!

As the onlookers rejoice in amazement at the man's new-found abilities, Peter

asks why they are surprised, and reminds them that they've already heard of the works of God through Jesus, some have probably even witnessed such acts, so why are they surprised?

Peter brings them back down to earth by taking the attention away from the lame man, and from himself as the instigator of the healing and he points them in no uncertain terms directly at Jesus. Jesus, remember him? He was the man you got killed. You rejected him. You could have had him released but you chose a murderer over him. You killed the author of life, whom God has risen from the dead! Remember, it's not that long ago?

You can just imagine the squirming and embarrassment felt by the onlookers if they felt any personal guilt at the death of Jesus?

I wonder if you feel any guilt at the death of Jesus? Do I?

Why should we, we weren't there when the crowds were shouting "Crucify Him" and If we were, would we have acted any differently?

The truth is there are moments of crucifixion taking place all over the world every day. What about the times we remain silent while the innocent are killed, when we resort to deceit or violence of the tongue, when we refuse to love our neighbour and those who hate us. When we turn a blind eye to what's going on around us. Aren't we then just taking part in other forms of crucifixion? The reality is that when we hurt someone, or ignore the hurt of others, we are all just as responsible for Christ's suffering as those first century Jews, Peter knows exactly how we feel because he denied Jesus three times.

Being a Christian is not easy, but the good news is that there is always hope of forgiveness from God who uttered the words from the cross "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do". We all do things wrong, we can all be hurtful and selfish and turn a blind eye to bad things. But as Christians, followers of Christ, we are called to perfection, as he was perfect. As mere human beings, at times we fail.

It is our responsibility to recognise those times, and to change our behaviour and to say sorry, and try harder. The Resurrection gives to all of us new life and new commitment to change our ways and to joyfully share the story of Jesus with others.