

Readings: Acts 3:12-19; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36-48

Text: Luke 24:41-43 - While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Theme: *Belief is not easy but the biblical witness, that God is the God of life, is true*

My first ever funeral was that of a man in his 30 who died three days after my induction as the minister in his church. As I sat in my office, waiting for his parents to discuss the funeral service, I thought about this man; so young. I also thought about his parents, whose grief I could not imagine.

After a long moment of contemplation and reflection, I trained my gaze on the large window directly in front of me. And I swear that 'I saw' the young man walking along in the garden in front of the manse. And yes, I felt a tingle running up and down my spine!

I quickly calmed down and I thought: 'Hmmm! That was interesting. It was like peeking through a quantum physic experiment where things also appear weird'. I then remembered the beginning words of the Uniting Church funeral liturgy, which I had been studying since I was informed about the death: "We are here today ... to affirm the Christian conviction that while death is the end of mortal life, it marks a new beginning in our relationship with God."

As I reflected on those words and my brief encounter with the 'other life', it suddenly occurred to me that death was the door through which we walk into that life beyond mortal life, and a window through which we can see it from this life.

Today is the third Sunday of the season of Easter and we are continuing with the evangelists' stories of Jesus' resurrection. We heard Mark's version on Easter Sunday. Last Sunday, we heard part of John's story. Today we heard the third part of Luke's story. If you thought John's story last week was full of drama with Jesus showing his scars to the disciples, then we are going see an escalation of that feeling in Luke's story as the risen Jesus eats a piece broiled fish.

Today's passage is the third part of Luke's resurrection story. Like the other three evangelists, Luke's story begins with the women going to the tomb early in the morning. Later on, two of Jesus' followers travelled to Emmaus, a town about 12 kilometres west of Jerusalem.

As the two walked and talked, the risen Jesus joined them and shared in the conversation. The two, however, could not recognise Jesus until Jesus broke bread and gave it to them after they had arrived at Emmaus. The friends appeared overwhelmed by the experience that they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples. The conversation that ensued is where today's passage begins. So, while the friends and the disciples were talking, Jesus stood before them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Now, take a moment to consider the fact that such a thing as a resurrection had never happened before and, of course, things like quantum physics where similar, counter intuitive events could

be observed, were still two thousand years into the future. How do you think might the disciples' reaction be?

Yep. They were terrified. Indeed, they even thought they were seeing a ghost. I suspect there was complete silence, with people looking at each other in total silence and wondering: "Is this real?"

Jesus could see the fear in their faces. So, he said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

Jesus' words had little effects. The disciples were filled with joy, but they still could not believe what they were seeing. Then Jesus asked them: "Have you anything here to eat?" I can almost see Peter nudging and whispering to John at the BBQ: "C'mon, John. Give him some fish. Let's see whether he'll eat it." So, they gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in their presence! Try and imagine the disciples' reactions. After Jesus had eaten, he reminded the disciples about the things that he taught them before he died. The disciples remembered and their minds were opened to understand the scriptures (v45).

Now, we tend to think that the disciples were unfaithful and a little thick. But their reactions were quite normal under the circumstances. I am sure we can remember a moment in our lives when our faiths were momentarily attacked by doubt. That is normal; that's being human. So, don't be too harsh on yourself when those moments occur.

Further, the disciples were not silly at all. Remember panicking during an exam, and everything that you learnt flew away? The disciples were terrified, also. In the reading from Acts, they are really performing as expected. Also, the theology in John's letter, that we are God's children, is quite profound; it's proof that they did up their skill levels and that they really did believe that they encountered the risen Lord after Easter and during their ministries.

Belief in what we read in and hear about the Bible is not easy. But our lived experience, history, and advanced knowledge, especially knowledge from physical and biological sciences, can all confirm the biblical witness that God is a God of life, and where one phase of that 'life' ends, a new beginning is ushered in. This is the situation with the resurrection of Jesus. Us who are on this side of that continuum cannot make heads and tails about the side beyond death in this life and it is the testimonies of the disciples that continue to nourish our own faith.

Since my experience at my very first funeral, I had enjoyed every funeral that I had conducted since, because I totally believe in my heart and mind that Christ is the resurrection and in the affirmation of our faith about our own, bodily resurrection.

Rejoice, people of God! The Lord is risen! And so shall we!

For the glory of God. Amen.