

Easter Sunday
17 April 2022
High Street Uniting Church Frankston
David Fotheringham

Read: **Luke 24: 1-12; Acts 10: 34-43**

O God, let the gospel of your Son come to us, not only in word and sign, but in power and love. Continue to reveal yourself to us by your Spirit, in our encounters and in our reflections, that we may follow your way with grace and joy. Amen.

This year we have been heard the story of Easter through the gospel according to Luke. Luke has been keen to present an orderly account of all the goings on around Jesus, which we hear about through both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. There were other stories to be told at the time: stories of control in Jerusalem, stories of attempted rebellions on the part of the aggrieved population, stories of the destruction of Jerusalem which was in the news very much around the time that gospel stories were written down. Even in the midst of these other hugely significant events in the life of the nation, Luke tells *this* story.

Even when there is so much going on in the world today, *this story* captures our attention, because *this story* resists being explained away and enriches and challenges all the world's expectations about God.

In Luke's account, that we hear today, the women arrive at the tomb first, early in the morning, before dawn. I don't know if it was as beautiful a morning as this morning in the garden across the road at the Dawn service, but the women were there early. They learn that Jesus is risen, and go and spread the news.

Peter, on hearing about it, runs to the tomb, sees it empty, and then returns home, amazed.

That's all we hear of Peter on Easter morning. It's hard to imagine his emotional state. Further encounters between Jesus and Peter will have to wait, though the reading we had from Acts tells us how much things develop in the days and months that follow, and indicate more about Peter's own further encounters.

It's worth seeing some of this through the eyes of Peter, a brave and flawed human being. This is Peter, who is prepared to step out of a boat to try walking on the water, and who sinks. This is Peter who proclaims Jesus as Messiah, and who tries to stop Jesus going where he needed to go. This is Peter who goes all over the countryside with Jesus, and who denies Jesus at the most critical moment, at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. After the resurrection, in the days and weeks that follow, Jesus appears to Peter, the disciples, and various others; and soon Peter finds himself telling the story, as in the reading from Acts today.

Peter gives us a summary account of this whole story of Jesus. He starts at Jesus' introduction by John the Baptist, and talks about how Jesus went around doing good and healing people, for God was with him. Peter doesn't talk about Jesus being a great teacher, even though elsewhere it's clear that Jesus taught about God with authority; Peter focuses here on Jesus going about doing good, caring for people. Yet he, even he, was killed, but on the third day God raised him from death. And that's where the whole story really starts, because without that, none of the other parts of the story are really worth telling.

Peter gives this summary of the story that we heard this morning in the house of a Roman Centurion - one of the former enemies, you might imagine, if you just think back to Good Friday. But Peter is there in a Roman Centurion's house, and he's still learning. Peter's there because the Holy Spirit is continuing to lead him to greater understanding of the greater inclusiveness of the love of God.

When Peter had come to the house of this centurion, Cornelius, he had listened to Cornelius, first of all. He listened to the other's story, and having listened he recognised the grace of God already present in Cornelius's life. Listening for other's experiences of God is part of how we discover the Holy Spirit at work, and widen our understanding of God's mercy.

Having recognised the grace of God already present, Peter completes the story for Cornelius with the assurance that God has been seen and heard in the person of Jesus; that Jesus was raised from death, and that the risen Jesus continues to extend grace and embrace for all who receive him.

Even in the context of strife between Jews like Peter and Romans like Cornelius; even in the context of conflicts and troubles in the world that looked to derailing society; even when there are so many stories that rightly demand our attention, Jesus' resurrection and the embracing love of God make a difference for every individual life.

There are plenty of conflicts and troubles in the world now. We have, at this point in history, an absolute imperative to act for the climate, and an astonishing lack of attention to it in the current election campaign. Meanwhile, we are all but fighting a war, with many being displaced and needing support. Don't get me wrong: these big stories matter.

When Luke was compiling the gospel stories together, his nation was being smashed by Rome: a big story. But even in the midst of that, *the story of Jesus, his life, resurrection, and our ongoing learning through the Holy Spirit* is what Luke was compelled to tell.

In it we hear that God is not defeated, and that there is light of hope that darkness can never extinguish. In it we hear vindication for the one who goes about doing good and healing. We hear that Jesus lives, that his forgiving grace and hope is for us, and that we too can live in hope and faith and our stories are significant.

Jesus' resurrection is startling, confusing, amazing; and all that Peter did on that first day was go home, amazed. What we can learn from Peter's experience is that, going from this day, he was listening for God and for people's stories; he started seeing where the Spirit was at work, and he started learning ever more of the generous wide grace of God and the invitation to faith that welcomes you and me.