

High St Uniting Church Frankston

The power of stories

Luke 24: 13 - 35



I have often used a gemstone as a metaphor for passages of Scripture and stories; the many facets of the gemstone inviting us to look at and into the stone from different points of view. One stone, many appearances. There is a mysterious and beautiful way that stories have of holding different explanations and applications all at the same time. When someone says what a story means to them,

you can respond, “Yes, and to me it also means ... “

For some, the story of two disciples walking back home, disappointed and grieving, who recognise Jesus in the breaking of bread, and then remember how they felt being guided through scripture, is a telling of what happened on the day of resurrection. For others, it’s a story that developed from the experiences of the early church; they met and were educated by Jesus through study of scripture and celebration of communion. And for others it’s a story of what can happen for all of us if we approach scripture and communion in the right spirit. And the mysterious and beautiful thing about scripture is that all three of those explanations can happily sit side by side, held in this wonderful little story, captured by Luke, two people who find Christ revealed in scripture and sacrament.

And that wonderful multi-layered aspect of stories takes on a new depth when you connect similar stories – a joy of the Gospels. Sitting this story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus with the collection of resurrection stories opens other meanings, including the very powerful idea that God and Christ reveal truth in different ways for different people, according to what they need to have their faith ignited.

Mary was troubled and confused and didn’t understand what was happening at the tomb, until Jesus spoke her name. that personal connection was what she needed. John – who many presume to be the ‘disciple whom Jesus loved’ – ran to the tomb with Peter, neither of them knowing what Mary was talking about. He saw the graveclothes with the head cloth off by itself and believed. He was a logical sort of person. Unlike Lazarus who had to have the graveclothes removed when he shuffled out of his tomb, Jesus had risen with no need of them. And if the body had been taken, the graveclothes wouldn’t be there.

Thomas had heard all the witnesses and stories but wanted actual personal evidence. Whether that was because he felt left out, or because he was the type who needs evidence to break through doubt, evidence is what he was offered. Those two disciples on the road to Emmaus were discussing everything. They were the sort of people who had to intellectualise and understand. And Jesus came alongside and engaged them in intellectual discussion, and their heart were fired.

On their own, these stories hold many meanings, as all good stories do, but together they become facets of a grander story. And that there isn’t just one, accept it or not, story is an important outcome of that. Each of these resurrection stories appeals and applies to a

different part of us and a different type of person. The logical person, the one who desires evidence, the one who craves a personal connection, and the one who wants a deep, intellectual conversation. The power of the resurrection stories is in the breadth of the stories, even if they might look a little contradictory, we each will have our favourite because it speaks to a need within us. And, of course, there are the people for whom the resurrection is almost a side issue. The ones who say, that's all well and good, but what does that mean here and now, in this time and culture? And for them, it's not so much Jesus is alive, let's join in praise to God, but the example and mission of Jesus is ongoing, let's get out there and love, and care, and help. It's not the resurrection stories they connect with, but the stories of Jesus of Nazareth. For those people, the power of the stories of Jesus is in his engagement with people outside the influence of synagogue and Temple. Compassion instead of judgement, care instead of criticism.

Some 20 years ago, there was a song by an artist called Chris Rice called *The Face of Christ*. It's a song about a man dealing with the homeless, the grieving, and the lonely, and when he looks them in the eye wondering;

"I've got a funny feeling  
I might be dealing  
with the face of Christ".

If we really believe that Christ is Risen and goes before us, and if we hear the words of Jesus say, "What you do one of the least of these you do for me", then the stories of the resurrection aren't just about witnessing to the resurrection but are pointing us to go out in the world to find and follow the Risen Christ. It isn't just Jesus is Risen, my sins are forgiven, I'm connected to God, it's JESUS, the teacher and healer and prophet, is Risen, let's carry on God's mission of reconciliation and renewal; forgive as you have been forgiven, love as you have been loved, connect with the world as you have been connected to God.

Stories are wonderful, multi-layered, carriers of truth, and the stories in scripture of the resurrection held great meaning to the Early Church, who told and kept them, and the different communities kept different stories. Put together, they carry even more meaning, but if they just sit as ways to transmit teaching or truth, we have missed an important part of the power of stories. They call us to do something. If you respond to personal connection, then be the one who makes personal connections. If you respond to logic and deep discussions, then set up groups and have those discussions. And if you respond to the fact that it is Jesus who was resurrected, then lead the missions of love and healing and help to the world. In other words, allow the power of stories to take the meaning into your heart and not just your head.