

It takes time to emerge from ‘lockdown’, and courage too. The disciples are hearing stories now that something momentous has, indeed, taken place in Jerusalem. That the empty tomb signals not further loss but a fulfilment which changes everything. It’s as if the pandemic is over, has suddenly gone, but we are still conditioned by sin and social distancing – still at a distance from one another – afraid to be one. And the risen Jesus stands among them – among us – to overcome their fear. It’s all right, you can touch me. It’s all right we can share food again. What you thought was loss is everybody’s gain. What you are seeing is God’s faithfulness to his covenant, to his people, to his ‘single-plan-through Israel-for the world’, as Tom Wright describes it. I am the Christ who will fulfil God’s promise to Abraham – to the father of many nations.

*Look up at the sky and count the stars if you can. Just so will your descendants be. (Gen. 15:5)*

And Abraham believes this; trusts that it will be so no matter how impossible it may seem, epitomised by God’s call, later, to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, only for God to stay his hand and for the play-acting to be over. Abraham’s faith is now justified.

*. . . because you have done this, because you have not refused me your own beloved son, I will shower blessings on you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore. Your descendants will gain possession at the gates of their enemies. All nations on the earth will bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed. (Gen.22: 15-18)*

Jesus stands among us, here in this eucharist, so that God’s love may come to perfection in us, also. That love that drives out all fear and enables us to be God’s commandment for the world that is, to be a blessing for others because God has first blessed us in Christ. It’s not that our obedience to God’s commands earns us this status but demonstrates it to be true (Tom Wright again). We are, indeed, risen in Christ. For the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem, this call is firstly to their own people, to the Israel of their day. They go out from the upper room to continue their regular worship in the Temple, but they cannot do so now without telling everyone else what has happened to them ‘in Christ’.

*So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this. (Lk.24:46-48)*

‘Repent and believe the Good News’ is a call to us as much as anyone else. ‘Repent’ in the sense of turning round again as the disciples at Emmaus retraced their steps to Jerusalem. Turn round, return to your roots, to that original covenant God has made with you; to that promise of faithful love to you and all your descendants. Do not be afraid. Peace be with you. The enemy at the gate is overcome. Lockdown is over. The Lord has provided his only son and the sin’s pandemic is ended. Or in the words of our Easter preface:

*“and in his rising the life of all has risen”*

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