

New Life

Readings: Acts 10:34 – 43, Luke 24:1 - 12

Who is good at thinking outside the square? Most of us like to think we are – and some are. Many of us though; definitely me; often don't see what is right under our noses let alone what could be.

It's easy for us to give Jesus' disciples a hard time because they didn't get what was happening. Jesus had warned them about his death and promised resurrection, several times, but they didn't want him to die – so they didn't plan for it. If they thought about Jesus' death at all, they quickly brushed it aside – it was too painful to dwell on.

Then when He did die they were completely bewildered. They had no idea what to do so most of them shot through. They were so devastated that they totally forgot the other things he had said – his words about what would happen on the third day – new life! Resurrection!

So when there was no body, the women who'd gone to anoint his body, stood there, in Jesus' tomb – puzzled! Some versions say they were 'perplexed.' That's closer to the meaning. They just didn't get it.

As two angels appeared it all became overwhelming – they were terrified! But the message the angels brought amazing hope! Their terror was replaced by uncontainable joy! When the women heard that Jesus had risen they remembered that Jesus had already told them that would happen.

But others of the disciples were still in a state of shock. The women ran back to tell the men who also had forgotten Jesus' promise of resurrection. The men thought the women were talking nonsense. They couldn't believe it - although Peter did go and check. Finding the empty tomb brought even more confusion and shock.

We could think that Jesus' followers were the biggest idiots ever. But how much of what is happening around us do we miss? We often focus on our own world and don't notice much else.

The amazing thing is that the Lord will often break into our world by bringing new life when we least expect it.

On Labour Day of 1988 Dave Dobbin had a TV interview with a particular broadcaster. The broadcaster got right under Dave's skin.

Dave was furious with the guy. Looking back he said "I could have screamed at (him) or stabbed him with a fork, but I didn't. Instead Dave whispered "God help me." That was something completely out of character.

Later at home with his wife, Dave was still upset about how he handled the interview.

Then he heard a quiet voice saying 'No, you kept it cool. You were very dignified, and now you're home and it's all okay.'

Dave, a lapsed Catholic, was like the women in the tomb, or like Peter when he received the vision from God, (we'll hear about that soon). Dave was completely flummoxed, and yet reassured, by the words spoken to him.

In Dave's own words 'Next thing I was flat on my face on the floor. I was just zapped.' The Press, 26/3/16 C4

The Lord breaks into our lives in unexpected ways.

After Jesus' resurrection, after the Holy Spirit had come, the disciples were hardly recognisable as the shocked and helpless people they had been.

No longer were they afraid. Now they were filled with boldness and they began to turn the known world upside down. Thousands of people began to follow Jesus themselves as a result of the witness of those early disciples.

And yet the Lord had much more for them. They still had narrow thinking. The early disciples were all Jewish and they figured Jesus had come to rescue the Jews. It took a great deal of persuading that Jesus message, Jesus resurrection life, was for the whole world.

Peter's sermon recorded in the book of Acts tells of Jesus resurrection. If you just heard that bit you'd think, yep there goes Peter doin' his thing. But there is a clue in Peter's first and last words. "I see clearly that God shows no favouritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right." And "Jesus is the One of whom the prophets testified saying 'Everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name.'"

You see Peter has recently had a mind-blowing experience. That's why he is where he is right now. Peter the Jew, is in the house of Cornelius - a Gentile, sharing the Good News of Jesus the Jew. It doesn't sound like a big deal to us but to Peter it was humungous.

It is a bit like a closed-Brethren coming into our house, eating a meal with us, and then inviting us to church with them. It doesn't happen.

God gave Peter a dream – in fact the same dream three times. Whenever anything is repeated three times in Scripture or in life, we ought to take notice. God is really trying to attract our attention. The dream was given three times because the message was completely out of Peter's previous experience and world-view. The Lord's bottom line was that Peter should go to the Gentiles and share the Gospel with them.

Now, not only did Peter have a dream but Cornelius did too – well a vision, but we won't quibble about details. Cornelius was an army officer not given to flights of

fancy. He was a no-nonsense sort of man. Then in a vision Cornelius was told by an angel that he should send for Peter. So he did.

Can you see how out of the norm this was for them? Both men were used to mixing with their own kind. Jews and Gentiles did not mix. Gentiles were heathens. Gentiles made Jews unclean. That is why they both needed to be told, and told very clearly by God, that they could both share in Jesus' Good News.

Cornelius was a devout man; a good and kind man. But he needed to hear the Gospel. He needed to hear that Jesus had come for people like him; not just for the Jews. Not just Cornelius and his household, but all the Gentiles, needed to hear that.

And Peter needed to see that he and the other disciples were to share the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, not just amongst their own people, but with all people across the world.

Funny thing – Peter knew that already. But much as Jesus followers forgot Jesus warnings about his death and the reassurance of his rising again, they also forgot Jesus message that they were to go to the whole world!

Jesus will not be boxed in! Ever! He won't be boxed in by self-centred thinking, or a narrow world-view or anything else.

While Peter was sharing Jesus' death and resurrection with Cornelius's household, the Holy Spirit fell on them. They began praising God in different languages. Wow! They weren't expecting that.

Most of us go about our own lives minding our own business thinking about fairly mundane things. We aren't usually thinking about much outside our own orbit much less expecting something miraculous.

But you can never tell when Jesus, in the form of the Holy Spirit, will fall on people, shattering complacency – stirring us up.

For Cornelius it was when they were hearing the Good News about Jesus. For Dave Dobbin it was when he said a harmless little prayer asking for help – just help to get through an interview – not for God to intervene in his life in any kind of dramatic way.

Martin van Beynen, a journalist and declared atheist, has a different view. He wrote of Easter: I suppose we can celebrate the crucial part Christianity played in the civilisation of the human species. It was a great idea. The problem was it relied on human beings to carry it out. The Press 26/3/16 C5

He is right in that human beings are the ones who generally do carry Jesus message. And we do stuff up, a lot!

But Jesus resurrection turns everything upside down. It did when it happened. The timid Jesus followers became people who changed the course of history.

And still the Spirit of God breaks out and breaks in to lives with the Good News of Jesus. It doesn't all depend on us but on the One who initiated the whole thing.

Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed.**tk