



Church in a Bag

Sunday 18 April

Dubbo Uniting Church



A Gathering

Dear God, we thank You for sending Your Son into the world so that we may be saved. Thank You for the fulfillment of your word by the resurrection of Jesus and His ascension into heaven. As we celebrate Christ's risen presence among us, we pray that You will provide hope and assurance in the messages of word and prayer we share today. Continue to teach us as we journey through life. Meet us as we fellowship with one another, and move in us that we may claim all your promises as our own. Open our eyes and quicken our hearts as we ask in Jesus' name. Amen

Preparation

In this week's gospel reading, the third and final appearance of the resurrected Jesus is described. Once again Jesus takes the time to teach, instructing his disciples on how all scripture has been fulfilled with his crucifixion, death and resurrection. It is during this third encounter that Jesus reveals that it is to be the ongoing mission of the disciples to proclaim the "good news" of resurrection and the promise of repentance and forgiveness.

Not surprisingly, the disciples' first reactions to Jesus' presence and words of "peace" are panic and doubt. To reassure them, Jesus offers up his body for examination and, by asking for food, makes the truth known. This is the beginning of the fulfillment of the rest of Jesus' mission. Jesus' mission now is the mission of all his disciples. The proclamation of resurrection, starting with repentance and forgiveness, will bring eternal life.

Now, having seen the resurrected Jesus, and having unpacked the biblical stories pointing to God's purposes, the disciples are called to be "witnesses to all people".

First Reading: Acts 3:12-19

"While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished..."

I have always been in awe of the strength and determination of Long-Distance runners. In the 1968 Olympic Games, John Stephen Akhwari of Tanzania was entered in the marathon. He suffered an injury during the race, but he persevered in the darkness on the streets of Mexico City, all alone, as the other runners left him behind. An hour after the race was over, he hobbled into the darkened stadium, his right leg bandaged in two places, grimacing with every step. The few thousand spectators who were lingering in the stadium noticed him and began to applaud as he limped around the track. When he finally stumbled across the finish line, holding his leg with both hands, the crowd erupted.



Later, Akhwari was asked by a reporter, "Why did you do this? You were in such pain, and you couldn't win". The runner looked at the reporter as if he were crazy and answered, "Sir, I don't think you understand. My country did not send me 5,000 miles to start the race. They sent me 5,000 miles to finish the race".

How do you measure greatness when you finish last? What kept him going, painful stride after painful stride? A great vision kept him going. He wasn't running for himself; he was running for his country. How about running—sacrificing and serving—for Jesus? How about running for the gospel, which means not running for country but running for the entire world? The gospel, after all, is good news for the world.

The good news that God has triumphed over evil in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and is bringing to the world his healing, loving rule. How about connecting with that vision? "By the faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong." (Acts 3:16)

Second Reading: Luke 24:36b-48

"They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost."

Consider this: Can you imagine the state of your mind, if the physical presence of your most loved family member, recently deceased, was to appear before you? I'd think that you'd be more than startled, to say the

least. So you can imagine the initial reaction of those first disciples in that small room?

It **is** startling, when we come to know that Jesus is startling:

- It's startling that Jesus is Son of God. It's amazing because He was born in a stable to lowly parents: an unwed mother and a carpenter who were both given to heavenly dreams of angels and important missions.
- It's startling that the very first act of Jesus' ministry was to be baptised. Jesus surprises us by surrendering Himself to God through baptism, just like you and me.
- It's startling that after His baptism, Jesus is placed in the desert where He is tempted for 40 days and yet emerges triumphant. It's marvellous that He promised to help us do the same, if we simply call upon Him.
- It's startling that Jesus taught in such a way that captured the hearts and minds of the people who listened. It's more astounding that Jesus didn't teach anything that wasn't already a part of the faith. Instead, He simply brought it to fulfillment.
- It's startling that in the midst of the pain of His crucifixion, while nailed to the cross, Jesus was still able to look with compassion upon those who judged Him, beat Him and crucified Him. The most wonderful words we may ever hear are those from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do". The depth of His love for us is truly mind-boggling.

What may be the most startling thing of all, is that Jesus left His message for us - the startled and terrified - to carry to the rest of the world. We're called to live startling lives of faith. Let yourself be startled by Jesus. Let the startling forgiveness He offers through the cross, flood through you and wash you clean of everything that keeps you separated from God. Let the startling Good News of the empty tomb bring you to new life. Let the startling power of God's Holy Spirit fill your heart and soul so you can live like Jesus.



A song to sing or to read: O for a thousand tongues to sing

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise
the glories of our God and King
the triumphs of his grace!

Jesus! The name that charms our fears
that bids our sorrows cease
such music in the sinner's ears
is life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin
he sets the prisoner free
his blood can make the foulest clean
his blood availed for me.

He speaks, and listening to his voice
new life the dead receive
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice
the humble poor believe.

My gracious Master and my God
assist me to proclaim
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of your name.



Words and music in the Public Domain

Closing Prayer

Holy God, you have called us to follow in the way of your risen Son,
and to care for those who are our companions, not only with words of
comfort, but with acts of love. Seeking to be true friends of all, we offer
our prayers on behalf of the church and the world. Amen.

With thanks to Dan Eaton for preparing today's reflection



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