**10am Choral Eucharist on Sunday 14th April – Revd Ceri Payne**

**Acts 3:12-19, Luke 24:36-48 and 1 John 3:1-7: New life in Christ can be better understood by reading Scripture**

*Lord, through your Holy Spirit, may our minds be opened, our doubts dispelled and our hearts strengthened by what we hear. Amen.*

In May 1956, so almost 70 years ago, the National Childbirth Trust was established. Its objective was to help people who were about to be parents to be better prepared for what was to come and for this new way of life.

The NCT would provide a better understanding of childbirth and what came next: sharing knowledge of anatomy and the physiology of pregnancy and childbirth, being realistic about the pain of labour and how to manage it, promoting good nutrition and answering questions about breastfeeding. The NCT was started by a woman who had suffered from a dearth of understanding about what childbirth involved. She wanted women, and men too, to be better prepared for their new way of life.

In a sense, all three of our Bible readings are about people being prepared for a new way of life. From devout Jews worshipping at the Temple, to the disciples talking amongst themselves about Jesus’ appearance on the road to Emmaus, to John’s community of believers; all of them need to be prepared for what is to come.

Peter is addressing the Jews who have just seen the healing of a man everybody knows has been lame from birth. Peter told the man ***“I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.”*** And Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately he entered the Temple walking and leaping and praising God.

Peter asks the onlookers, come to the Temple to worship ***“The God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our Ancestors … why do you wonder at this? Why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?”*** Peter tells them that in their rejection of Jesus, and in the raising of Jesus from the dead to which the disciples were witnesses ***“God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah – the Chosen One – would suffer”***.

Jesus had been healing people throughout Judaea and the surrounding lands. But now these Jews have seen the power of God at work through faith in the *name* of Jesus. This is something new.

And so now a new understanding of the Scriptures is needed to negotiate this new world. It is by faith in Jesus’ name that these Jews can ***“turn to God so that [their] sins may be wiped out”***. As Peter reminds them, everything that has occurred had been foretold.

**Do you find yourself wondering about the promises of God, and about the power of faith in Jesus?**

**Could it be that the answers to *your* questions are to be found in Scripture?**

In our gospel reading from Luke, Jesus asks the disciples ***“why are you frightened, and why do you doubts arise in your hearts?”*** And Jesus quickly reassures them ***“it is I myself”***.

Not a ghost, ***“for a ghost does not have flesh and bones”***. Even “***in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering”***, so Jesus takes a piece of broiled fish and “***ate it in their presence”***.

Ghosts don’t eat fish.

And again, it is as Jesus ***“opened their minds to understand the Scriptures”*** that the disciples learn how to negotiate this new reality.

It will be a few more weeks to Pentecost, and to the coming of the Holy Spirit, who will teach them everything and remind them of all that Jesus has said to them.

And so Jesus helps the disciples to understand how it had been written that ***“repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in [the name of Jesus] to all [the] nations”.***

When we read the Bible, we have the advantage of being able to read what would happen next for these disciples.

We have Luke’s account, in the Acts of the Apostles, of the new communities of believers who began with those first disciples and of how the news about Jesus spread far and wide.

We have the letters of Paul and others to these new communities, helping them address the issues facing them as they transitioned to this new way of life.

**Are you somebody who has doubt in your heart? Do you worry, about the reality of Jesus?**

**Could it be that the answers to your worries and doubts are to be found in the Bible?**

And then, in John’s letter, we can hear John providing reassurance to his new community of believers.

He wants them to understand that there is no reason for them to waver in their confidence in their new identity as children of God.

They have been given all the knowledge they need, for as he tells them, ***“what [they] do know is [that] when [Christ] is revealed [as their king] they will be like him [and] will see him as he is …[and they] know that … no one who abides in him sins.”***

**Do you waver in your confidence that you are a child of God, who is being transformed into the likeness of Christ?**

**Could reading the Bible regularly help you to remember that you are a child of God, freed from the power of sin, and gradually being made like Christ?**

Listening to last week’s *The Rest is History* podcasts about Martin Luther and the Reformation prompted me to read more about the life of Martin Luther.

In 1520, on his way back to northern Germany from Worms, beside the River Rhine, having refused to recant in his criticism of the Church, Martin Luther was abducted by his protector the Elector of Saxony and taken to safety in Wartburg castle.

Frustrated because he had nobody to debate with, Martin Luther turned to translating the bible from Latin into German, and in 11 weeks had completed the New Testament.

Luther said of this time, ***If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I have shaken shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant***.

We have the Holy Spirit to open our minds to understanding the Bible, and to remind us of what the Bible says. But our minds can only be reminded of what we have previously read. It is the same as with our times tables: when the pressure is on, we can’t hope to recall 7x12 or 8x9 unless we’ve first learned our times tables.

We need to have confidence in our faith in Jesus for when the tough times come.

For hard times surely will come, in our own lives, and in the lives of those we love.

So why not take a leaf out of Martin Luther’s book and discover the comfort and strength to be found in reading the Bible? Why not use these weeks running up to Ascension Day and Pentecost to see what the disciples did next, with their new understanding of Scripture.

The best way to do that is to read through one of the gospels from start to finish – Mark is the shortest. Or try reading through one of Paul’s letters.

Better yet, why not reach out to a friend and suggest that you both read or re-read one of the gospels, and get together to discuss what you’ve read.

Coming to faith in Christ means a new way of life, and it needs a new way of thinking.

As we read the Bible, we’re being equipped, through the Holy Spirit:

* to wonder more fruitfully,
* to worry less, and
* to be less inclined to waver in our faith.

Let’s give thanks for the Bible.

Amen.