

“open minds...”

It seems to have become something of a Hollywood trend to follow the theme of our post Easter readings.

The Sixth Sense was all about a boy who can see dead people - after a fashion and the fear he had to deal with.

You could watch the “Ghost Whisperer” or any number of shows it seems, with the dead appearing regularly. There's even a new Ghostbusters movie. Not that I'm suggesting they are worthwhile seeing! Horror movies have long thrived on this sort of scenario too. Cultures the world over have 'horror' traditions around the dead; that much is common. Little wonder that accounts, such as the four gospels, all show the trouble the disciples had in coming to terms with the new after - Easter reality.

The Easter day story was of the women who were terrified and fled the empty tomb. Today we have the disciples startled and terrified when they see the once dead figure of Christ. It's the stuff of 21st century horror!

So it's understandable then, that the risen Christ greets his followers saying, “Peace be with you.” But I think that perhaps there is more in this greeting than a calming of nerves. “Peace be with you” Now Jesus might have come back somewhat upset. He had been betrayed, deserted, Good Friday had not been good for Jesus!

“Peace be with you.” Jesus does not appear to be angry.

No, he comes bringing peace, reassurance, and mostly - himself. “Peace be with you” is not just a greeting that says, 'don't worry, I'm not mad at you'.

Neither was Jesus just a spirit of reassurance or a ghost of goodness - as we'd find in a Hollywood plot.

“Touch me and see me says Jesus, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I

have.” And then he eats some fish to prove it, or perhaps because he was hungry!

“Peace be with you” said Jesus, and the peace came in a tangible way, through real flesh - peace incarnate in fact - as had been announced at his birth.

“Peace be with you” he says - and now that we are set to wonder about this being something made real, we need to know what Jesus meant with his words.

“Peace be with you” has behind it the rich meaning of the Hebrew “shalom”. It means the growth to fulfillment, healing and wholeness, being part of the life abundant God created us for. So it's significant that Jesus brings this peace by his presence. In Matthew's equivalent we hear Jesus saying “I will never leave you.”

The writer Madeline L'Engle tells the story of when her four year old daughter cried out in the night. She tried to comfort her daughter with reassurance, “Don't worry dearest, God is with you” “I know that” said the daughter, “but I want someone with skin on.”

The concept of God is great, and the promise of new life in Christ through Easter is marvelous, but it's true isn't it that the most comforting presence has skin on, that the peace of Jesus was made real in flesh - and that we who are the body of Christ here today need to work to bring this peace - the healing, wholeness and a sense of growing fulfillment - shalom peace to those around us, to our world today.

After we've dealt with the fear, the seeing and touching issues and the lunch, Luke goes on to tell us the reason for Jesus popping in. “These are my words”, says Jesus, “that I spoke to you while I was with you (the inference here is that Jesus is somehow not with them anymore) – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.” It's about understanding. To do this we need to have an open mind. Even sometimes to have our mind opened. Sometimes it's easy, sometimes

painful – to have our minds opened to new understanding. Jesus was committed to this process. Opening minds of disciples and hearers, Pharisees and scribes, governors and prostitutes to seeing God's love in a new and real way.

Luke wants it clear to us that Jesus' death and resurrection was not a random event. It fulfilled scripture. 'It was meant to be' is one way of coping with the story, but also has its problems. The scriptures include the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets, where there's a huge scope and variety.

Jesus then points them forward to their task: to proclaim forgiveness of sins in his name to all the world. It finds its echo in 1 John. 'What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.' Children of God, doing things in the character of Jesus.

Forgiveness is the primary benefit. Luke has Peter later put it this way: 'You know what happened in all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John announced, about Jesus from Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and power, who went around doing good and healing all who were disempowered by the devil, because God was with him. And we are his witnesses...'

For Luke, to fulfill the hope of the resurrection is to tell the story of Jesus. That means telling what he did, how he was rejected and vindicated. At the same time to live by the power of the same Spirit, by doing good and bringing liberation for all. It's radically simple. It's inspiration is in the parables, like those of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son - ultimately in Jesus, himself.

In the Letter of John we get a summary in pithy form of what this means. It's not about how many morality boxes we can tick to qualify ourselves as a child of God. It's about how and whether love flows. Not how many acts of love we summon up our energies to perform - ticking the goodness boxes, but how much we open ourselves to receive the

love which God gives, which can then flow through us to others. Love gives birth to love. New Easter life gives birth to witness, to people who want to share new hope in love.

The point then of having our minds opened to the gospel is not so we have marvelous intellectual understanding, but so we know that to get on with doing loving things and sharing new hope is putting flesh on faith, makes the love of God an experience 'with skin on'.

Amen.