

The Fifth Sunday in Lent
26-03-2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Ezekiel 37: 1-14 The valley of dry bones resurrected
Psalm 130 With the Lord there is forgiveness
Romans 8:6-11 The Spirit gives life to those who believe
John 11: 1-45 Lazarus raised from the Dead

Introduction

During the last three weeks we have had three long readings from John's Gospel, which have shown us how Jesus transformed the lives of those he came into contact with. Two weeks ago, we had the story of the Samaritan Woman at the well. Last week we had the story of the Man born blind. And today we have the story of Jesus' good friend Lazarus being raised from the dead.

Today I'd like to look at how we, too can have our lives transformed by Jesus, by exploring :-

- What Jesus claims about himself.
- How Jesus expects a response.
- How all who accept Jesus have the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' Claims about Himself

So firstly, who is Jesus. Many people have differing views of who Jesus is. I had a friend at High School who was definitely not a Christian. He was into Eastern Philosophy and ended up over in an Ashram in India for a little while, but he still looked at Jesus as an historical figure who was a good teacher.

But what did Jesus say about himself?

John's Gospel is full of "I am" statements from Jesus. Let's look at some of the things that Jesus says about himself:-

John 6:35 I am the bread of life
John 8:12 I am the light of the world
John 10:7 I am the Gate for the Sheep
John 10:11 I am the Good Shepherd
John 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life
John 15:1 I am the true vine, my Father is the gardener
John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches

Today in John's Gospel 11:25,26 we hear Jesus talking to Martha, and this is what he says:-

"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Of course, I also believe Jesus was a good teacher, but as Christians we believe Jesus is so much more. Jesus himself, claimed to be a lot more than just a good teacher. If we considered someone was just a good teacher today, then they would probably not point to themselves, but to God. In Jesus' teaching, when he points to God, he points to himself. I wonder how you would feel, if I told you that the only way to know God was to believe and obey everything that I told you. You might think I was getting a little power hungry, or that I had lost the plot, but you probably wouldn't think I was being a good teacher.

Jesus made some pretty exclusive claims about who he was, and the purpose of his earthly life. Jesus claimed to be God, and that is why the Pharisees eventually convinced Pilate to crucify him. Because of these claims that Jesus made, Christians have come to believe that Jesus is God, the second person of the Trinity.

Response to Jesus

So how do we respond to these claims that Jesus made about himself? Just as Jesus says to Martha, "Do you believe this?", Jesus asks the same of us today. The Christian response to this question is an unequivocal, "Yes!"

To respond "Yes" when Jesus says do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life, is primarily, to put all of our trust, all of our hope, and all of our faith in Jesus. This is not a faith that merely believes Jesus existed, but rather a faith that accepts that Jesus died on the cross for us, and that he rose from the dead to give us hope. A faith that "Worship's Jesus Wholeheartedly".

How we come to this faith as Christians, can vary widely. Some people have grown up in Christian communities, and can't remember a time when they hadn't accepted Jesus. Others may have had a major life changing experience, and may be able to tell you the date and the time they became a Christian. The way you came to say yes to Jesus may vary, but that is not critical, what is critical, is the fact that you have said "Yes", to faith in Jesus.

Just as Martha replies to Jesus, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

We are called to acknowledge who Jesus is, if we are to experience life in all it's fullness.

Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to those who believe

But having faith in Jesus is not all about us. It is in fact, all about God. We only find true meaning and purpose by being in relationship with the God who created us. If we truly turn to Jesus in our lives, then Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to live within us.

The readings from Ezekiel and Romans today, point to one of the things that happens to us as we place our faith in Jesus. God's Holy Spirit comes and dwells within us. And it is the Holy Spirit that transforms and brings renewal to our lives.

The reading from Ezekiel is a vision of dry bones being brought back to life. It is not a literal story about dry bones, but rather a visual image that God has given to the prophet Ezekiel to give to the people of Israel. When Ezekiel gave this prophesy the people were in exile. They had disobeyed God, they had been taken into exile, they were living in a foreign land, and they were being ruled by others. The image of the dry bones was an indication of the state of the nation. But God was giving them a message of restoration. The image is of bones being restored to life and the breath of life returning to these bodies. This prophecy is an analogy for the renewal of Israel.

Likewise, as we put our faith in Jesus, we are brought spiritual renewal. God is able to renew us and the Church if we acknowledge and call on the Holy Spirit to be at work in us.

The reading from Romans also makes it clear that the gift of the Spirit is for all who have faith in Jesus. We hear the words of Paul:-

¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came upon particular people, at particular times, for particular tasks. In the New Testament we hear how the Holy Spirit comes upon all those who accept Jesus. Not only upon some Christians, but upon all Christians. There is no differentiation between Christians with regard to the presence of the Holy Spirit. If you have accepted Jesus, the Holy Spirit dwells within you.

As Christians, as followers of Jesus, we are a people who have God's Holy Spirit within us. The Holy Spirit is there to help us, and to guide us, into living our best lives. No matter the physical circumstances we find ourselves in, the Holy Spirit is available to renew and transform our lives. If we surrender everything to Jesus, and allow God to be the controller of our lives, the Holy Spirit is enabled to produce fruit in us.

Conclusion

So, as we place our faith in Jesus, we can be assured of God's Spirit within us to help us, and to guide us in our lives.

We may not physically have our sight restored like the man born blind from last week's gospel reading, we might not be physically raised from the dead dramatically like Lazarus was, but having faith in Jesus assures us of a full life. Not only in this world, but also in what lies beyond it.

This Lent, are you placing all of your faith, and all of your hope, and all of your trust in Jesus? So that the Holy Spirit will be enabled to transform your life. Amen.