

Reflection - The Third Sunday of Easter
14-04-2024
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 3: 12-20 Peter explains how Jesus, the one they murdered, is the Christ

Psalms 4 If we call on God, he will protect us

1 John 2:15–17, 3:1-6 Do not love the World, You are Children of God

Like 24: 36b-48 Jesus appears behind locked doors
Jesus explains the scriptures and tells them they are witnesses

Introduction

Today I'd like to focus on the last sentence of Jesus in our Gospel reading today. Jesus says to his disciples:-

You are witnesses of these things.

Just like those first disciples of Jesus were witnesses to him then, as followers of Jesus today, we are called to be His witnesses now.

But what is a witness and what does a witness do?
One dictionary definition of a witness goes like this:-

One who, being present, personally sees or perceives a thing; a beholder, spectator, or eyewitness.

Another dictionary definition goes like this:-

One who gives testimony, as in a court of law.

So, from this we might say a witness is someone who sees something, believes what they saw, and then usually tells someone else what they saw.

Witnesses to Resurrection

But what are Jesus' followers' witnesses to. They are witnesses to His life, His Death on the cross and most importantly His resurrection. This is what we celebrate at Easter, our most Holy Festival, and this is what gives us hope.

A little further on from our reading from the Acts of the Apostles today, we hear in Chapter five the story of the Pharisee Gamaliel. We hear how the religious leaders wanted to kill the disciples of Jesus, for proclaiming that they

were witnesses to the Resurrection. I don't like Gamaliel because he is a real fence sitter, but he warns the other Pharisees, that if these disciples are of God, then they will not be able to silence them.

We see down the ages over the last 2000 years, despite challenges and persecution, people have continued to witness to the resurrection of Jesus.

First Disciples

Jesus called his first disciples witnesses and in our reading from Acts today Peter referred to himself as a witness.

Today we hear how Peter witnesses greatly to who Jesus is, and why as human beings we have a great need for Jesus. Last week we heard how Thomas was a witness to the resurrected Jesus and declared, "My Lord, and my God."

Along with Peter and Thomas, there were others who were eyewitnesses to the resurrected Jesus. Such eyewitnesses have combined to give us the Gospels and I believe this is all the evidence we need to join them as witnesses. As Jesus said to Thomas:-

Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.

Us as Witnesses

Well, we've looked at some of these first witnesses and how they acted, but how are we to act as witnesses now, 2000 years after the event.

The reading from the first letter of John today gives us a sobering lesson on how we are called not to love the world. I would like to summarize this reading by saying we do actually, have to live in the world, but we do not need to conform to the ways of the world.

We live in this world, but as witnesses to Jesus, we are to be Children of God. John mentions three things specifically that are of the world, and that we are to avoid:-

1. The desire of the flesh – preoccupation with gratifying our physical desires.
2. The desire of the eyes – craving and accumulating things, which is materialism.
3. The pride in riches – obsession with one's own status or importance and the things we have.

It's important to note that these three things that John warns about are all very inwardly focused.

To be a witness for Jesus we must be sure to take care of ourselves, but our focus should be on loving God and serving others.

For us to be witnesses we need to have a sure foundation in what we are witnessing to. In the Gospel today, it says Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. The Holy Spirit can do this in our lives today as we study the Bible. There are many ways to help our understanding as we read the bible. We can read the surrounding passages to put the reading into context. We can speak to others in a study group. We can consult commentaries on what others have written, but as we read the Bible, we should also pray that the Holy Spirit will open our minds to understand, so that we can receive insight to put God's word into action in our lives.

As witnesses it is our lives that show the belief that we have in what Jesus has done for us.

It is important what we say, but it is equally, if not more important, what we actually do. If we are to be witnesses to what Jesus has done for us in our lives, then others need to see it in our lives.

I've probably shared this quote from St Francis before, but I'll share it with you again. He said words to effect:-

We should do everything possible to show Jesus to others, and if necessary, use words.

Conclusion

Today we've very briefly looked at some aspects of being witnesses of Jesus. I pray that as members of St Cuthbert's Anglican Church, we might be strengthened and encouraged to continue as Witnesses to the resurrection. I pray for this both on an individual level, with those we meet in our daily lives, and as a faithful church to the community around Tweed Heads in which live. Amen.