

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 19 April; Third Sunday of Easter 2015

Sermon: Our Lord is Risen

Acts 3: 12-19, Luke 24:36b-48

I am delighted to be in this role this morning. It is with great pride that I am again preaching another sermon in this season of Easter....oh! what a privilege to stand here and share with you the greatest news this world has ever heard and seen, our Lord is Risen. This message of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour....a message that has been passed on over two thousand years, a message we received in this Church in this place over 250 years ago.

In my Easter sermon in North London two Sundays ago, I started off by telling the congregation that during the week leading up to Easter Day, I received a 'WhatsApp' message which went something like this:

Gen Abacha a former military leader of Nigeria died some years ago, he is now referred to as the late Sani Abacha; Atta Mills President of Ghana died and reference to him is now is as the late Atta Mills. Michael Jackson, Nelson Mandela, Margaret Thatcher, Princess Diana, Winston Church, Mahatma Gandhi have all died and now they are referenced as the late.....

My Friends, over 2000 years ago our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross and nobody, not even the devil (sorry, I know we don't use the word devil in Hinde Street); not even the devil calls our Lord and Saviour the late Jesus.

Wow...what a living God we serve. And that in my opinion is the greatest affirmation of the church that **He Lives**. We celebrate and wonder at the virgin birth, Christ's profound teachings, the miracles, and his mere presence wherever he was, these all point to his embodiment of the character of God, but my friends all these put together do not come close to the affirmation that Jesus Christ is alive and resides within each and everyone of us right here, now, and elsewhere. That is the message of Easter which we continue to celebrate. The fact that we have seven Sundays and 43 ordinary days; a total of 50 days to celebrate Easter; a whole season; underlines the centrality of the resurrection in the lives of each one of us as Christians. We thank God for so, so much...

It was this message that Peter and John took to the Temple having been given a chance opportunity firstly to perform a miracle on a lame man and secondly to expound and illuminate those in the Temple about the things they have been hearing, about the man who was crucified and who had been raised from the dead. It was also in this Temple that Peter who was now into his second sermon was able to call a spade a spade. There was no political correctness. No velvet gloves. He told

those in the Temple, exactly what they had done. He pulled no punches. Acts 3: 13-15.....The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our Fathers, hath glorified his Son, Jesus, whom ye delivered up and you denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

But ye denied the Holy One and the Just and desired a murderer to be granted unto you...And killed the Prince of Life whom God has raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.....

They got a good telling off.....We do not speak like that anymore for fearing to upset others; we would be accused of not being sensitive; of not being tolerant etc. Peter says, you have done all these things....now you have the chance to repent, to change your lives.

It's a straightforward story at first glance, Peter and John walk up to the temple. They met this man who had been in that spot for forty years, he was lame. He asked for alms in his usual way. There and then, we see a demonstration of God's wonder; those who saw the transformation of this man were amazed. Silver and gold I have none, but such as I have give I thee, In the name of Jesus of Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.....

This was a life changer for the lame man and for Peter and John. What has so emboldened Peter and John, evidently, the work of the Holy Spirit that was promised to them by Jesus.

Hitherto, they were cowards and Jesus' appearances made them all the more confused, anxious, and doubtful. They found themselves in an impossible position having been betrayed by one of their own, their leader crucified having denied that they had, had anything to do with him.

It was into this state of helplessness/hopelessness, locked up in a room, perhaps thinking about their next move, how to escape into obscurity where no one would recognise them and be accused of being accomplices, that someone appeared in their midst, an uninvited guest, appeared from thin air. You can imagine the consternation on their faces. Is this a ghost?.....The issue of ghosts I do not think would capture the imagination of the modern Western world or modern western mind, but not so in much of the Eastern world or in Africa where there is widespread belief in ghosts. So at this period, it would not have been unheard of or difficult to comprehend notions or existence of ghosts or even to encounter ghosts.

Unlike the Gospel passage we read last week in St John where Thomas expressed doubt about the resurrection, in Luke's gospel we read earlier, we are not told that the disciples expressed any doubt about who the person standing in front them is/was; but doubt is implied by the question of Jesus: why are you frightened and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Luke 24: 38 The disciples wanted to see the evidence, Their inner self could not believe what their eyes were seeing.

I worked for many years collecting and documenting the history of black people in Britain. Paradoxically, I did not study history in my academic life. A very long story about how I found myself in this role. Suffice it to say that I learnt so much during that time that I became an authority in the subject. I became the one who would be asked to write articles, make speeches about the lack of, or absence of Black peoples representation in history texts etc...but even though I would make references to primary source documents as historical evidence, having off course, done the research, I would be asked about the evidence, I want to see the evidence...the evidence...where do I find the evidence.....I do not believe African and Asian people have been here that long..... their inner selves could not believe what they were hearing....they wanted to see the evidence.

When Barack Obama was elected President of the United States, there were so many challenges about his nationality and fitness to be president. He was challenged to produce his birth certificate. After a prolonged process and pressure from others, he was forced to produce his birth certificate. He had to do so. Donald Trump and others alleged it was a conspiracy and Obama had been born in Kenya – they needed proof. And so the birth certificate was released. Trump refused to believe the facts until he had seen with his own eyes.

My friends, to question, to have doubts, to be confused are all human characteristics so when the disciples got the invitation to touch him and to see the scars of his wounds he was asking the disciples in a way to confirm what they could see physically but what their minds could not fathom and therefore accept.

My parents were deeply religious people especially; I would say my mother even though she was not the local preacher...my dad was. When Mama passed away, I left London to organise the funeral with my siblings and other relatives. Each one of us in my extended family has got a role in the church as Ministers, Stewards, Class leaders etc. Yet I remember so well that during the funeral, I could not contain myself as we sang those great hymns of faith; I could not give voice to those words. These are times when most people are honest to voice their doubts and to struggle with belief, these are the times when our faith acquires more significance, is more pertinent and has more meaning for our lives in the midst of our loss.

Each week we meet with Jesus through our Adoration, Confession and Transformation, we call An Act of Worship. We meet Jesus in the proclamation of the preacher through the guidance of God. We meet him when we share bread and wine together, *perhaps we should also share fish when we kneel before the throne of grace.*

And so it was on that glorious Easter morning that out of nowhere, from thin air, Jesus appeared with reassuring words, Peace be with you....Have you anything to eat?.....He showed them his scars, asked his disciples to see and to touch. It's him alright; he is not a fake or an impostor. But why is he still carrying the scars of Good

Friday? His resurrected body should be new, smooth, free of the marks of torture and pain.many of us face such experiences today.

There are scars that completely disappear others don't even though healing has taken place. Jesus' resurrected body could have been made smooth without the scars. But they remain because it is in those scars that we also come to realise and understand that there are things in life that are permanent and cannot be completely overcome; problems that will never be solved or resolved, situations that may change our lives completely forever but the circumstances that gave rise to those situations can never be erased. This was the situation at the Gate called Beautiful.

This man had been there for forty years, Scripture tells us his condition was about to be changed. He had no choice about where he was left outside of the temple, because others had to take him there, and so on this fateful day, Peter and John approached. The lame man was not to know who they were. He asked for alms in his usual way. What happens next is one of the most extra-ordinary acts of healing in the New Testament. The restoration of the ability of this lame man to walk was a visible manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit. It brought a complete transformation of the life of this man who went about jumping and praising God.

Perhaps, if he had moved from that particular spot in the Temple Gate, or if his friends had not brought him on that day, he would have missed the approach of Peter and John. He stayed in one place and eventually received healing. Thank God his friends took him to that particular spot every day all those years. I would suggest that his friends thought that, that particular place, that spot, was the best position for him to get as much alms from those going into the temple. He stayed put.

In the gospel passage, Jesus told his disciples: 'tarry here in Jerusalem'(stay put); wait here until you receive power from on high.

My friends, in our world today, we are under so much pressure to move on and not stay put. Not I would suggest that it is always good to stay put. There are times when moving on is better than staying put in difficult relationships, or in the same job if there are better opportunities elsewhere, but I would suggest that many times we move on for reasons that are not clear or absolutely promising. We pack up our bags and move on more times than necessary and we fail to receive our blessings by staying put.

In conclusion do you blame the disciples for doubting the power of God when all their expectations of Jesus as their Messiah, friend and teacher were destroyed? How do you feel when you have prayed and trusted and believed, but your expectations have all been contradicted by the realities of life? We dream dreams that many times turn out to be nightmares, our hopes are shattered, many people die without realising their dreams. But in Jesus, there is hope beyond the present pain, and laughter and joy beyond broken lives. When Jesus died, the expectations of the disciples also died, but raised on that glorious Easter morning. I believe that in our doubts, confusion and fear, Jesus comes along and walks by us, carries our pain and

sadness and shows us the path for renewal. He comes to us at moments when we least expect and in very surprising ways.

We are called to mission, to proclaim the good news of the resurrection, forgiveness and reconciliation, and the possibility of newness of life.

We are called to constantly reflect on our efforts and assess whether we have waited long enough for God's Holy Spirit or whether we are doing God's work by our own efforts. My friends I have just said that we have to assess whether we have waited long enough....to assess, evaluate, appraise our words we use in performance management...what I mean to say is that we should reflect on how long we have waited, have we been directed by God's Holy Spirit; have we heard that sweet small voice beckoning us to action; have we sincerely prayed long and hard. Luke tells us that to witness for God is a non-starter without the Holy Spirit.

Our task as disciples is to tell those in hopeless situations about the reality of JESUS who is alive and who seeks to encounter them in whatever situation they find themselves, the poor and marginalised, the sick, those who are bereaved and in mourning, the wealthy who are now turning to the use of crystals and rare minerals to find happiness and to reassure all of them that in their frailty they can find genuine hope.

Alleluia!. Alleluia!! He is risen!!! Amen

Sam Walker