

## The Third Sunday of Easter

26 April 2020

### READINGS

Zephaniah 3: 14-30

#### A Song of Joy

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;  
shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,  
O daughter Jerusalem!  
The Lord has taken away the judgements against you,  
he has turned away your enemies.  
The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;  
you shall fear disaster no more.  
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:  
Do not fear, O Zion;  
do not let your hands grow weak.  
The Lord, your God, is in your midst,  
a warrior who gives victory;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness,  
he will renew you in his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing  
as on a day of festival.  
I will remove disaster from you,  
so that you will not bear reproach for it.  
I will deal with all your oppressors  
at that time.  
And I will save the lame  
and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise  
and renown in all the earth.  
At that time I will bring you home,  
at the time when I gather you;  
for I will make you renowned and praised  
among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes  
before your eyes, says the Lord.

Acts 2: 14a, 36-41

#### Peter Addresses the Crowd

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

#### The First Converts

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.' And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Luke 24: 13-35

### The Walk to Emmaus

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

## COLLECT

Almighty Father, who in your great mercy gladdened the disciples with the sight of the risen Lord: give us such knowledge of his presence with us, that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life and serve you continually in righteousness and truth; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.  
Amen

# SERMON

Hedley Grenfell-Banks

It seems to me there are three sorts of Christians. No, I don't mean Roman and Anglican and assorted others; this goes deeper than mere sectarian divisions. I'm talking about which moments of the year are most important to you.

First, then, there are Christmas Christians. These are people who feel that the most important thing about Jesus is that he came to earth. If we wanted a posh theological word to describe them, we might call them Incarnationists. And, of course, they have a point. If Jesus had not come and lived among us, he could not have taught, he could not have died, he could not have risen. If you suggest that the Resurrection was a greater miracle, they would point out that the incarnation was, in fact, exactly the same miracle. Jesus came to earth twice, and the second time is surely not more important than the first.

I do not mean to suggest that Christmas Christians all think along these logical lines; most people, after all, do not apply either logic or theology to their beliefs; they simply feel that Christmas is the highlight of the Christian year, and that Jesus the baby is the Jesus with whom they identify. This is as much an emotional response as it is a rational.

Then there are Good Friday Christians. They seem, these days, to be a majority. Good Friday Christians are completely taken up with the doctrine of the Atonement; Jesus died as a sacrifice to obtain forgiveness for our sins. The Church gives a great deal of emphasis to the build-up to the crucifixion. We spend a week – a Holy Week – building up to the crucifixion, with a Thursday evening spent stripping the altar and washing feet, and a three-hour devotion on Good Friday while we contemplate the cross; and then on Easter Day itself, the culminating and defining moment of our year, we have a slightly extended Eucharist and go home to eat our chocolate eggs. Many of the hymns we associate with Easter are in fact Good Friday hymns. In, for example, Anglican Hymns Old and New, there are 85 hymns listed under the heading 'Atonement, Suffering and Death', and 66 under 'Resurrection'. The proportions are significant. So is the amount of time we devote to the two subjects.

Of course, the actual Easter season, from Easter Day to Pentecost, is the same length as the Lenten and Holy Week season; but the concentrated devotions of Holy Week are not repeated for Eastertide. Jesus died for our sins, say the Redemptionists, and that is the most important thing about him.

Thirdly, there are Easter Christians; Resurrectionists might be the word for them, if it had not been usurped by Scottish body-snatchers. We (because I confess to being one of them) see the defeat of Death as Jesus' great achievement. Perhaps the current emphasis on suffering and death is partly responsible for the drift away from the Church. Whatever else we do to revive the Church, we must start to base our faith on the event which sent the disciples out rejoicing to tell the world about Jesus; not on the one which sent them cowering into hiding.

The resurrection, after all, is the reason why we are Christians, just as the fact that we are here is the proof of the resurrection. If Jesus had not come back from the dead, the disciples would have remained in hiding, the death would have been just another example of the humane thinker who annoyed the authorities and suffered for it, and Jesus would be remembered in the same context as Socrates. It was the resurrection which caused Thomas to call him 'My Lord and my God'. Surely, his Godhead is the most important thing about him.

But what if we're all wrong? What if all this theology and speculation and dissension are pointless? What if the most important thing about Jesus is neither the beginning of his life, nor the end, nor the second beginning? What if the important bit is the bit in between? After all, he spent a few minutes being born, a few hours on the cross, a few weeks risen; and three whole years teaching and preaching. Perhaps we should stop theorising about him and start listening to him. It doesn't really matter which of the events of his life is most to be celebrated; what matters is to live the life he asked us to live.

The anonymous travellers to Emmaus said their hearts were burning within them while he was talking to them on the road. Our hearts, too, should burn while we listen to the Gospels. Jesus told us to love God and love one another; to love even our enemies; to be peacemakers, the children of God; to forgive each other; to treat all our fellows with loving kindness. Those who reject the faith are continually saying that religion is the cause of war and strife and most of the troubles of the world, but they are wrong, wrong, wrong. It is precisely the *denial* of religion that causes crusades and massacres and wars 'of religion'. It is our disobedience which lead to these evils.

Let's stop arguing about Jesus and listen to him for a change.