

REFLECTION – EASTER 3B

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

Introduction:

Following the death of the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip we have heard, seen and read lots of tributes as to the legacy he has left behind: the countless organisations with which he was involved; from military to conservation of wildlife, to support for the Arts to his foundation of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. I think for me one of the interviews that I found moving was of a young man who in his teens had ended up in prison and whilst there he embarked on the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and it was a turning point in his young life enabling him to break the crime cycle and go on to become a chef and take his place in society. “

While no interviewer ever asked Jesus what legacy he wanted to leave behind, the question of legacy — what Jesus sought to leave behind — is an important theme in Jesus’ post-resurrection accounts. Jesus does not seem concerned with what the masses will have to say about him – rather, Jesus is concerned with what his disciples will know and believe, and what they will do in his name.

In today’s gospel, we encounter Jesus with his disciples one last time. This is the last time Jesus will share his peace with the disciples; this is the last time the disciples will be able to see and touch Jesus’ body; and this is the last time Jesus and the disciples will share a meal. After this, Jesus will lead his disciples to Bethany, where he will be lifted up and seated at the right hand of the Father.

But before their sojourn, Jesus addresses his disciples and presents them with a final testimony. Jesus tells his disciples that everything written in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms has been fulfilled by his passion, death, and resurrection. And now that God’s word has been fulfilled, true repentance and forgiveness can finally be proclaimed to all people.

Jesus’ legacy is his passion, death, and resurrection, and it has fulfilled everything promised in Holy Scripture. Through these acts, God in Christ has opened salvation to all nations, expanding God’s word through the Word made flesh beyond the people of Israel. But Jesus does not simply leave behind a legacy – a long list of accomplishments and accolades – but a covenant – an eternal and limitless promise.

While legacies are concerned with how an individual’s past achievements continue to have an echoing effect, covenants are a binding agreement, a pledge that continues to

have a tangible effect. Jesus' covenant is not a brief note in a musical score, but the final movement that captures the whole work. It is through this covenant that all of humanity is able to hear the sweet sounds of salvation.

Jesus has drafted his new and indissoluble covenant with his blood and implemented it once and for all by his dying and rising. In this, he not only makes his covenant eternal and binding but he also makes us benefactors in perpetuity of his work on the cross and in the empty tomb.

This new covenant has not supplanted God's previous covenants, nor even eliminated them, rather, through Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, God's promise is made attainable to all people regardless of status, class, race, or all other categories designed to separate and fracture the human family of God. This new covenant fulfills and expands God's covenant to Abraham and renews the hope and promise of the prophets and psalmist. God's covenant, God's word, has been completed by the Word of God, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

So, what does this covenant demand of us?

We receive some wisdom if we look closely at what the risen Jesus does when he appears to his disciples. While this may be the last time that Jesus is able to intimately share with his disciples, we know from all other post-resurrection appearances that this is not the first time that Jesus has offered his peace, or that the disciples have seen and touched his risen body, or that he has shared a meal with them. The risen Jesus ingrains into the hearts and minds of his disciples a sacred rite, a holy pattern to encounter him. From the empty tomb to the angelic vision to the encounter at Emmaus to Saint Peter's experience, the risen Jesus over and over again opens the minds and hearts of the disciples. He does this not by force or even by displaying the greatness of his resurrection – remember that the disciples do not recognize the risen Jesus at first glance – but instead opens their minds and hearts by continuing to share all of himself: his peace, his body, and flesh. Jesus opens the minds of his disciples not only so that they can understand the scriptures and grasp who Jesus really is, but also so that they may continue to follow in his way of love once he departs this earth. “You will be my witnesses”. They were to be witnesses to who He was and we are to be witnesses in our day. Just as the message of a crucified, risen Messiah was so new and misunderstood then, so it is now. Just as only a minority knew and believed that the Christ had come, so now few people have really heard about Jesus or truly believe in him. And as in the days of Peter and Paul, people are awaiting a Messiah: a financial Christ, a political messiah, and a saviour from whatever ails them. In this post-Christian era in which we live and work, the text for today is dynamic and alive. It's a simple message, but is that not what the apostles preached back then?

What we need is the boldness of Peter to say three things as he seizes their moment of wonder: 1) Don't look at us (v. 12); 2) Look at God and his Son (vv. 13-18); 3) Look at yourself (vv. 17,19).

Why did Peter stand up and say all this? He said it because a spectacular miracle had just occurred right outside the temple. A man no longer begged there for money; now he was jumping and shouting for joy. No longer did the people of the city look on him with pity, but with wide-eyed amazement. He was no longer crippled, but his feet and ankles were strong. He was healed and he was clinging to Peter and John. Peter says:

Don't Look At Us

After seeing this undeniable miracle and its result, the people, even as today always looking for miracles and heroes, came running to them looking for what else these two men with such great power could do. "Don't look at us," said Peter, "we didn't do anything!"

"Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? We work for Jesus!" Look At The Son Look at the names humble Peter and John used to describe their Master in our text: God's servant, Holy and Righteous One, Author of Life, and God's Christ. Far short of promoting themselves, they lifted up Jesus' name and gave us names which describe his purpose and beauty. Peter goes on to outline the events that led to Jesus' Death and he lays the guilt for that death firmly on us, BUT yet there is hope of forgiveness of our ignorance and cruelty because Jesus is Risen Peter and John didn't try to impress their listeners, they just spoke the truth about Jesus. "He's not dead anymore. His Father said, 'Get up, arise!' And he did. It is his resurrected power that enabled us to be channels for the miracle you just viewed. **Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"**

Peter goes on then to urge his listeners to repent and to know the forgiveness and refreshing power of the Spirit for themselves. We need to follow that example.

Our entire ministry, all our talking, all our planning -- and any bragging we do -- must lift up Jesus. More than that, our whole lives should be lived as if we are Jesus-with-skin-on!

A little boy about ten years old was standing before a shoe store on Broadway in New York City, barefooted, peering through the window, and shivering with cold. It was December. A lady approached the boy and said, "My little fellow, why are you looking so earnestly in that window?"

"I was asking God to give me a pair of shoes," was the boy's reply.

The lady took him by the hand and went into the store and asked the clerk to get half a dozen pairs of socks for the boy. Then she asked if he could give her a basin of water

and a towel. He quickly brought them to her. She took the little fellow to the back part of the store and, removing her gloves, knelt down, washed his little feet, and dried them with a towel.

By this time the clerk had returned with the socks. Placing a pair upon the boy's feet, she purchased him a pair of shoes, and tying up the remaining socks, gave them to him. She patted him on the head and said, "No doubt, my little fellow, you feel more comfortable now?"

As she turned to go, the astonished lad caught her by the hand, and looking up in her face, with tears in his eyes, answered the question with these words, "Are you God's wife?"

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.

What legacy will we leave of our Christian faith?