

Easter Living?



One of the bushes that flourish here on the mid-north coast of NSW is the cassia. Its bright yellow blooms stand out among the green foliage of other plants and trees. The cassia bushes on our one acre grew unannounced until they flowered through Lent and into Eastertide.

As Christians, we celebrated Easter Day in the best way we could from our lockdown positions, watching live-streamed services and praying alone. Yes, using our prayer books, we could respond to the triumphant cry, “Christ is risen” with, “He is risen indeed”, and even add our “Alleluia!”, but how did that event change the lives of the first disciples, and can it change our lives?

Jesus’ disciples rejoiced to see and speak with their risen Lord—more or less. The resurrection accounts in the gospels are messy and conflicting. What is certain is that life was not as it was before. Jesus was different, dead and then alive, appearing and disappearing, inviting touch and denying it, being recognised yet not recognised. Jesus’ followers were going through a time of mixed emotions, of fear, grief, delight, shame, anxiety, accepting forgiveness and trying to trust their leader again—more or

less.

I believe that the enigmatic Easter appearances experienced by the disciples can speak to us as we live each day through the current coronavirus pandemic.

Sometimes it can seem that we are still in a Lenten wilderness or locked in a tomb firmly sealed with a stone. We have passed through the events of Good Friday and Holy Saturday but have failed to drop our anxiety and emerge into Eastertide. Where is our transforming joyful resurrection life?

When we turn to the gospels, we have various stories about the risen Christ. Mark 16, Matthew 28 and Luke 24 recount how the women went to the tomb very early in the morning, found the stone rolled back and an angel, or two, present. An angel, or men, informed them that Jesus had risen from the dead, and they were to tell his disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee. Did they pass on the message, or if they did, were they believed?

In John 20, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene as she grieved the loss of even his dead body from the tomb. She did not at first recognise Jesus, but thought he was the gardener. She wept in her distress and was unable to see her Lord until he called her by name. In her joy she wanted to hold on to him, but this was not allowed.

Luke, in chapter 24, tells of the sorrowing Cleopas and his friend walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They also failed to recognise Jesus when he joined them and tried to comfort them. On reaching Emmaus, the two disciples invited this stranger to stay the night as it was late. A meal began with Jesus blessing and breaking the bread. Recognition broke through their grief and they knew the risen Jesus was with them. He promptly disappeared.

On that same night, John tells us that the disciples were gathered in Jerusalem behind locked doors because they feared being killed. Suddenly the risen Jesus appeared among them offering them peace. It was hard for them to accept the presence and peace of Jesus. Jesus verified his identity, not with a blaze of glory, but by showing them the wounds in his hands and side. He then affirmed their vocation to be sent into the world, as he had been, and breathed on them, imparting to them the life of the Holy Spirit, and giving them the power to forgive sins.

The risen Christ met his disciples, men and women, in many places, physical, emotional and mental. He comes to us also wherever we are and often unexpectedly.

We are invited to gratefully recognise and receive his presence.

It is easy for fear and anxiety to lurk at the back of our minds as we move through this strange disturbing time in our world. We wonder whether we will catch the virus and perhaps pass it on to vulnerable others. For how long can we continue to live like this? When will it end and allow us to physically come together again with friends to socialize, worship our God and receive Holy Communion? As the risen wounded Christ was with the first disciples, so he is with us sharing our fear, pain and worries. Further, Christ offers us God's deep inner peace to share with others.

In our chapel is an Easter poster issued by St Paul Multimedia Productions. It states, "I am alive. I am with you." It is not the memories of Jesus' resurrection that keep us going, but *knowing* that our loving Lord is alive and with us always, forever, in whatever place we find ourselves.

The cassia bushes give joy to all who see their blooms. We are called to love others as Christ does, by thanking them, noticing their needs, caring about their suffering and serving them in whatever small or big ways are open to us. Such Easter living may at times be messy, but it reveals God's love, and can transform our lives and our world.

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