

Out into the World



Above is a photograph of the excavated main road and theatre at Ephesus. In the 1st Century CE, Ephesus, now located in Turkey, was the greatest commercial city of the Roman Province of Asia. It's magnificent main road lined with columns, led to a harbour, which has now silted up. The port connected Ephesus by ship to Rome and many other cities. About two kilometres north east from Ephesus was the renowned temple of the goddess Artemis.

During Eastertide we read of the risen Christ meeting his disciples. But it was more than just a reunion between Jesus and his friends, it was a new beginning. The disciples, when strengthened with the power of the Holy Spirit, were commanded by Jesus to, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." (Mark 16:15.) The mission of the historical Jesus revealing God's love had finished. It was now to be carried on by his followers.

In Acts we have accounts of the journeys of Paul and others who responded to Jesus' command to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the whole world (Acts 1:8).

During Paul's third missionary journey he travelled to Ephesus where he spent over two years, making the city a base from which to evangelise the

surrounding area. (Acts 19).

At first Paul preached in the synagogue to the Jews, but after his words were opposed, he went elsewhere and talked to the Gentiles. Many of these were glad to listen and accepted Paul's teaching of "the Way", but not all. Some craftsmen believed that by converting the local people to Christianity and away from idols, sales of the silver cult objects they were making for the devotees of the goddess Artemis were threatened. Finally Demetrius gathered his fellow silversmiths and stirred them up to riot against Paul and his teaching. The mob began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians", and, taking hold of Paul's companions Gaius and Aristarchus they dragged them off to the theatre. Paul wanted to intervene but was stopped. The town clerk, responsible to the Romans for law and order, arrived, quietened the people, and sent them home. (Acts 19:23-41).

The call of the risen Christ to his followers to go out into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit to preach and witness to others of God's love and new life, is also our call. How can we best respond to this call to go out into various physical, mental and emotional places and minister to others? Can we, like Paul, at times accept apparent failure and criticism as well rejoice over success?

If we look at some of the ways the risen Jesus met and related with his followers we may receive guidance.

Mary Magdalene, alone and grieving, met Jesus in a garden. When she recognised him, she was sent to tell his disciples she had seen him, but they doubted. (John 20:11-18, Mark 16:11). Can we obey God, even when it seems useless?

Two people were walking home from Jerusalem to Emmaus when a stranger engaged them in conversation. They were sad and confused. They did not realise he was Jesus, but they invited him to stay at their home as it was becoming late. (Luke 24:13-31). To step out of our comfort zone and show kindness to another, is a way we can reveal God's love. We may be surprised when it is gratefully received.

The frightened disciples who huddled together in the Upper Room in the

evening of the first Easter day, were greeted by Jesus coming among them and offering them peace. (John 20:19-21). A week later Thomas had to be encouraged by a similar experience. Do we show patience and offer peace and encouragement to those who fear or doubt?

Peter and some of the others disciples decided in their troubled state of mind to return to their familiar work, fishing. A man standing on the beach told them to do something that seemed ridiculous. They obeyed, threw their net out again and collected 153 fish. Then they knew the man was Jesus. Peter's need was met when his forgiveness was confirmed and he was trusted with caring work to do. (John 21:1-19). Repentance and forgiveness are important acts in our relationships with others, and powerful witnesses of love.

Our work as Christians will always include prayer in some form. Together and alone, sick or well, we are to pray for all in need in every place in our world. At present we can pray particularly for all suffering in the war in Ukraine; for refugees and asylum seekers in many countries, including those held for years in detention by Australia; and for people still homeless because of the floods in NSW.

Finally, we are to remember that the call to proclaim the good news of God's love is not just to people, but to the whole of creation. This directs us to care for the earth and nature which are so closely bound up with our lives.

Can we today, as members of the body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, respond with renewed energy to Jesus' call to reveal God's love in the whole world, and to see/meet Christ in all those we serve?

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