

An Attitude of Thanksgiving - Easter 3

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 11-18; 1 Peter 1:13-25; Luke 24:13-35

Story of Miss B

If this is a story I have told before please forgive me. About 20 years ago a woman I knew was a physio at a Melbourne hospital when she was called to a woman who had had a leg amputated. This woman was so cranky and hard to get on with that the staff had resorted to avoiding her, as she was so nasty and demanding. The physio found it hard to stay and do her job as the woman was so awful to her, trying to dismiss her. But she went back day after day to do what she could and tried to talk to her as she seemed to be totally alone in the world. The woman's name was, say, Miss B and she had been a buyer for a large exclusive, expensive store in Melbourne and used to travel to Italy and other places regularly. She dressed immaculately and was known for her taste and elegance. But she had been a smoker and having lost one leg she was unbearable. She wasn't coping. My friend came one day and Miss B was even worse – the staff hurried to be busy elsewhere and my friend came up to the bed and asked how she was. She got told to leave in no uncertain terms and was about to when she felt a check in side her prompting her to stay and offer some physio. Miss B said she didn't want physio but she suddenly grabbed her hand and said 'I'm so scared'. My friend said 'why' and Miss B said that she had just been told that she had to have the other leg off and that she might not survive the operation. My friend said very carefully that she had a way of dealing with fear and that it was to ask Jesus to be with her. She shared with Miss B how God loved her, very briefly as the physio had to get to other patients and also there was a Matron on this ward who didn't like lingering. So she took Miss B through a little prayer asking Jesus to come and be with her in her need.

Suddenly Miss B said 'He's here!'

And my friend said 'Really?'

Miss B said: "He's so beautiful!"

My friend said 'What's He like?'

Miss B: "He's so beautiful, His eyes, oh His eyes are so beautiful. He is all dressed in rags and He is in bare feet. And He is so beautiful."

My friend had to go but she said that she left a woman who had been nasty and a person that no one wanted to be with, changed completely and was now a woman in love. She said the Miss B was totally besotted with Jesus.

My friend didn't get back to the ward but heard from the staff that Miss B was a different person after seeing Jesus. She was kind and nice, no longer demanding and critical. A total turn around – and when she returned from surgery she didn't recover, leaving this earth to be with Jesus.

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I want to look at the scriptures from the perspective of attitude.

Miss B had attitude – an attitude that for most of her life separated her from God. She didn't, in her work life, have time for Jesus. She focused on her life and success but when she was close to death and fearful an ordinary woman, a Christ bearer, told her the simple truth that Jesus loved her enough to die for her. As a result she encountered Jesus and fell in love with Him. The truth of what Jesus had done broke through her attitude in her time of need and she was saved for eternity.

In the Acts reading the attitude of the crowd is revealed, initially, as being less than impressed. There seemed to be a low public estimation of the disciples – they are perceived as a bunch of drunks. We can imagine that as Peter gets up to speak on that Pentecost the crowd was probably sceptical, critical and expecting to have a good laugh at the expense of those who had had a few too many. But when Peter speaks the attitude of the crowd changes dramatically.

Peter's words are simple. He quotes the Scriptures, Joel and the Psalms. He summarises the Gospel message in v 36: *"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this; God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

This simple statement of truth changes the hearts and attitudes of the crowd and in verse 37 we are told: *"When the people heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"*

The people acknowledged their failure to live God's way, their sins, and their shame and had remorse – but in themselves that is not enough to save them. It is like they have seen the need to do something – it is like their blindness has been lifted and they now a need – they have been convicted of their sin. But a conviction has to go further.

Every time others or we have this conviction remember in order for it to be theologically valid a conviction must lead to conversion! Or in the case of a believer it is about reaffirming Jesus is indeed our Lord.

They cried out – what shall we do?
Is that our cry at times?

Peter tells them in simple, straight- forward words.

- Repent
- Be baptised – for the forgiveness of your sins, accept you are forgiven, and
- Receive the Holy Spirit

And remember repentance is much deeper than saying sorry it is a turning back to God and living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

V 36 again: *“be assured of this, God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*

What changed the crowd’s attitude from being sceptical and critical?

They heard the scriptures and the Good News being proclaimed and they responded. The Word broke through.

In our Gospel today we have the well-known Emmaus journey. These two disciples also had a blindness because of attitude and expectation. They are walking along and Jesus comes up and walks with them. Walks with them.

The Passion of Jesus is over. Jesus had completed what He came to do and now His journey on earth is extended to these disciples. And of course extended to us, His 21 century disciples. We are His hands and His feet.

However, these two disciples are unaware of the extension yet and they do not recognise Jesus is walking with them.

Why don’t they?

What is their attitude that they would miss such a thing, especially when He, a great teacher, teaches them what the Scriptures had to say?

V 27 *“And beginning with Moses and all the prophets He explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.”*

Teaching is important – even for those who have known Jesus well – for everyone can still be blind – blind to some big things and blind to some small things.

Why are the two on the road to Emmaus blind?

What is affecting their perspective?

A similar question for us – why are we blind at times?

What affects our perspective?

Well for the two a couple of things are clear in the text.

V 17 they are downcast. When we are down we look down but we must look to God first always – for God is life. Look up – choose to look up and see Jesus lifted high.

Secondly they are preoccupied in the events of Jesus' passion. They know all the details of the events and they even know all the rumours.

How often do we go over and over past events and spend time on rumours and hearsay?

So the two disciples are familiar, very familiar with all the aspects of Jesus' story. And it is strange isn't it but the more they knew the more blind they were to His unexpected appearance.

This can be so true for us – we can know all the aspects of Jesus' story well but be blind to Him walking with us, moment by moment, step by step, choice by choice.

What changes their attitude from this sense of hopelessness? What shifts their blindness so that they can see Jesus?

V 30 *'When He was at table with them, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.'*

V 31 *'Then their eyes were opened and they recognised Him.'*

The Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, provides the moment for the disciples to see Jesus.

Recognition of Jesus in the Eucharist then allows the disciples to understand the previous teaching from Scripture.

Word and Sacrament – they go hand in hand to help us see Jesus.

The Word, the teaching and the Eucharist can all combine to open our eyes and our hearts to fresh revelation or encounter.

As we saw with the crowd, or the two disciples on the Emmaus Road, or with Miss B, our attitude affects how well we see.

What stops us from seeing?

In our familiarity with the Jesus story, does our knowing of the facts stop us walking with the Risen Lord in the power of the Resurrection?

Every time we come to church the combination of Word and Sacrament can be a **Resurrection Meal** –one in which we celebrate our salvation and one in which we anticipate the heavenly banquet. Sometimes familiarity and regularity can mean that we forget why we are here – to celebrate our

salvation and to give thanks for it. To worship the God who not only created us but also redeemed us out of Love by His own body and blood.

In this celebration we also anticipate the heavenly banquet that is to come. Charles Wesley called the Eucharist the 'antepast' of heaven, the same word as 'antepasto', what one eats before the main course comes along!

So participating in the Eucharist is a participation in the whole ministry of Jesus – past, present, and future. That is why we acclaim together in the midst of the Great Thanksgiving: **Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!**

I began with a story about the attitude of Miss B blinding her to the love of God until in a vulnerable moment that blindness was swept away after the witness of a physio at the right moment. As she heard the Good News she saw Jesus. I mentioned the change in attitude of the crowd at Pentecost who when they heard the Scriptures proclaimed in the Power of the Holy Spirit repented and put their lives under the lordship of Jesus.

Then we saw in the Gospel how the attitude of the two disciples walking to Emmaus and their focus on the details of the Passion, in that time of their loss and grief they had their eyes opened when Jesus gave thanks and broke bread. A simple formula of speaking the good news, of hearing the Word and participating in the Sacrament – helps overcome blind spots in seeing Jesus. For we would all wish to see Jesus.

And those words: '*He gave thanks*' stand out to me about another way to conquer attitude. This giving thanks comes through so clearly in the Psalm. The attitude of gratitude exudes from the Psalm.

V 1 "*I love the Lord, for He heard my cry for mercy.*"

This Psalm says to us that we give too little thanks to God for the many good experiences in life. It shows us another way to things that may disillusion us in our daily life.

We see in the psalm that the **recognition of God's goodness** and the **discipline of expressing thanksgiving impart** to the psalmist a true sense of identity. "I am your servant, the son of your maidservant."

Thanksgiving has become the prevailing attitude – and this gives a joyous outlook on life.

Clearly the psalmist thanksgiving is no mere duty: it is true pleasure and it becomes true testimony.

It is the attitude of one who sees the Lord.

This is an attitude for us in attending the Eucharist where, through **Word** and **Sacrament**, we **see our Risen Lord** and **respond with true pleasure and joy!**

Then our experience of **seeing Jesus** anew **each Sunday** leads to fresh testimony and then even fresher, more vibrant thanksgiving!!

Let us pray: