

Sermon 19 April 2015 Acts 3:12-19 Luke 24:36 – 48 ‘No Need to Apologise for Wonder’

*Prayer: Amazing Creator, send your Spirit to re-create us this day. Change our hearts and minds to follow more closely the ways of Jesus, and be a witness to his reality in our lives. Amen.*

‘No need to apologise for wonder’ – but what kind of wonder? English is a fascinating language – this wonder? Or this? But actually I wonder if either – or all of the above are a distraction from opening our minds to the message of the Gospel of Jesus – the Risen One.

Don’t get me wrong – wonder is a good thing, and wonder with questions or wonder at the beauty of the world; the glory of God, the way miracles break through our “rational” mind-sets; all these are good to wonder about. And I am sad when we find ourselves needing to apologise for “wonder” of any kind. Cv

But there are times we do find ourselves apologising! Maybe it is one of those times we find ourselves unable to explain how someone was healed; or unable to explain *why* Jesus healed some and not others; why the disciples sometimes were unable to heal; *why* today we know some people are healed – and others not – ***even in this room***, we know when the Lord has healed us – *and* the when it hasn’t happened. *And* I think it is these moments and places of un-knowing we fall into the temptation of apologising....

Maybe it’s one of those times we don’t have all the answers and the person we are talking to is asking / demanding of us and why we believe what we do and we find ourselves apologising because somehow we can’t open their minds to understand... Maybe it is a debate within our own-self because of our wonderings about scripture / about a story of Jesus / about what a speaker has said – ***or*** something we’ve read... and – and **somewhere in the Christian church** faith journey, ‘wonder’s’ like this have got a bad reputation – and so we feel guilty / bad about real – honest – ‘wonder’ – and so we apologise...? Cv

The **great thing** about our title today – is that no matter what it is behind the feeling that we need to apologise for wonder – **there is no need to do so**. No need to apologise for the times when in Jesus name people are healed. Because that’s just what had happened, when Peter stood up to address the crowd in the Acts reading from this morning. The disciples had just healed the lame man – who went away from them walking and leaping and dancing for joy....<sup>\*1</sup>

The crowds around the disciples are amazed (filled with wonder? wondering?) and Luke tells us that Peter responded with an explanation. He claimed that the power which Jesus exercised as a faith healer was **again** evident in this act. In Jesus’ name and with his power the man had been healed. It was in part a proof of Jesus’ resurrection and so became the starting point for Peter to teach about the ‘why’ and the consequences of Jesus execution.

**Remember** that Jesus in his time was known as a<sup>\*1</sup> healer and exorcist, and in his world that meant having the ability to liberate people from the powers and plights which oppress and lock them up; to release them from their sins, and the consequences thereof. And so making people **whole**, was seen as doing God’s work and not only evidence of God’s action – but now God’s **continued action** through those who follow Jesus and witness to him in their lives.<sup>\*1</sup> Luke has Peter say: ‘You know what happened ... **And we are his witnesses...**’ (Acts 10:37-39a). cV

<sup>\*1</sup> For Luke, to fulfil the hope of the resurrection **is to tell** the story of Jesus and give his testimony. That means telling what he did, how he was rejected and then vindicated; and it is **at the same time** to live it by the power of the same Spirit, by doing good and bringing liberation and release for all. This includes the call for repentance and the forgiveness of sins. The **key** aspects of the testimony are the name – **in whose** name and the **resulting forgiveness**. The name you see is not just the person but it is also his power. Forgiveness is the primary benefit of the resurrection because it is not just *any one* – but it is **Jesus** who **enables** it. It is not just *any* miracle worker – it is Jesus, it is not just *any* ‘ghost’ – it is Jesus,

<sup>\*1</sup> W Loader, <sup>\*2</sup> JPetty,

this **new being** in our world, who calls for us to change our minds, because he **is real**. *He ate fish with his friends, but* who is also **very** different. He could ***“appear”*** and be ‘real’ inside locked rooms. And yes it is not only – you and I that wonder about all this- so did the disciples! And they were there!

Petty’s translation sheds a different light on the usual wording of this passage. We had NIV: **41** “And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement,” \*2 He says the Greek has a much stronger emphasis on their inner dialogue – within themselves, it’s not really ‘doubts’ / not believing because we have such **negative associations** with these words and those associations **are not** present. It is a real inner confusion, fear, amazement and plain wonder about just what was happening!

This understanding is accentuated by the continuation of Petty’s translation of the sentence. “But yet, when they were not believing, separate from joy, and were wondering, he said to them...”. This whole idea of being “separate from Joy” has me intrigued. The disciples had – joy and wonder all mixed in together – but separate, and just as they were excited and joyous because Jesus was with them – they **were also full of** questions and deliberations, not trusting \*2 and wondering – just “how” – ***and it was all ok with Jesus***. He just said -... “**You are witnesses.**” Cv

It is **their witness**, their **eye witness testimony** that **tells us this ‘new’ is real**. And because Jesus was real **through** this reality, **we have** new life, fresh starts, liberation from all that would cripple and disable us beginning on the inside out. This new, restored, healed new ‘being’ of ours is *because* of the resurrection of Jesus. **And because** they **told** us their story – gave us their testimony. **They** did not apologise for telling their story – why should we?

They understood it was **their story to tell** – not just a story *about* Jesus but **their story with Jesus** in the centre. Giving their testimony as **he asked** / charged / commissioned: The death and resurrection of Jesus, as told in the Hebrew scriptures, is to be “proclaimed,” *Luke says*. And it is to include repentance-- literally, “a change of mind”--“into release of sins to all the nations. And you are witnesses.....” \*2

Luke is ever-insistent Jesus full story is to include forgiveness of sins and it is Petty’s translating that has “release” because that is the literal meaning of the word *apheimi*. In fact, whenever sin is mentioned in Luke, it is always \*2 **linked** with *apheimi*--“forgiveness” or “release.” Repentance does not mean feeling sorry about what a creep you are, ***usually after getting caught***. **Repentance** has to do with a “change of mind” leading to “release of sins.”

**Their testimony** was that *because* of what God planned, brought about and released in Jesus that they experienced **within themselves and through** their ministries, **because of this of all this real ‘stuff’, we** are saved into wholeness, belonging, being released from the consequences of the wrongs **we have done** **and** we are enabled to be released **from the wrongs done to us**. Cv

There **is** something terribly individualistic about repentance and forgiveness. It is each ‘one’s / the ‘self’s’ responsibility to deal with it in the middle of community and preferably in the middle of a faith community – but... and I am happy to admit I haven’t got all the answers about repentance or forgiveness – ***and no***, I am not going to apologise for that – *because I happen to believe we were made for asking questions, for wonder, created to explore and seek...*

So I **can’t tell you** how it works **in your** life –but I do **know** some of what it does in mine. I **know some** of what it does in the lives of people who talk about it. And that’s another key to understanding Jesus and his story. When we witness and give testimony to how things work in **our** lives, there **is no need** to apologise. *There is a level* of understanding that says our experience /our story of the real Jesus that has its own validity **but it is within** the context of our community, the individual / the ‘me’ experience / my story is shaped into healthy and life –giving ways. This is another **key** effect of forgiveness: life – abundant life that gives life, wholeness, truth, joy and wonder! –No apologies necessary – just witness! Amen.

\*1 W Loader, \*2 JPetty,