

During the week a friend sent me a copy of an old cartoon – it is one many of you may have seen. In the picture there is one person stranded alone on a desert island waving frantically to another person in a lifeboat paddling desperately towards the Island. The speech bubble above both says ‘Yay – I’m saved’. Below the picture is titled ‘the bittersweet meeting of perception and reality’.

I often am amazed at how different people see the same situation; or even encounter the same person.

I was struck by this again on Friday as I was leading a funeral in which people bought such different memories of the same person. And even yesterday, in the Royal Funeral I was surprised (though maybe I shouldn’t be) at the different side of Prince Phillip I saw – his care of music and the environment.

How we experience a situation, how we remember a person or an event, as the cartoon points out relates so much to how we are feeling at the time – and our reality in that situation – as well as our perception.

When we read historical accounts in the bible – this is also true. We hear events from the perspective of different disciples; and from their reality at the time. What’s more, in our readings today from Luke’s Gospel and Act’s; the writers are following on from another event. Today we hear what happens after Road to Emmaus story; and after Peter heals someone. What we hear in today’s readings are followers trying to make sense – as we do – of the situation they are in.

In Acts 3 – after Peter has healed the paralysed man the crowd seems shocked at so Peter addresses them *‘why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?’* (Acts 3:12)

At one level, of course the crowd is staring – someone has just been healed and is now able to walk! But Peter, was known to the crowd, was known to be a follower of Christ – and this had all taken place on their way into the temple – and Peter expected them to have more faith – just as Jesus had done. But instead, the crowd seem fearful – maybe of Peter’s faith, or maybe their lack of faith. We can only guess what might be going in the minds of those who are watching. I wonder how we would respond if someone who had never walked was healed in our midst and started dancing?

But Peter challenges them by saying – why do you wonder – have you never believed anything God or the prophets have told you before! Quite a harsh comment – particularly for a disciple who just a short time ago struggled to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.

And yet Peter is right to challenge the crowd and us, in our ability to take off our filters and believe the power of faith. While we pray daily for things to change – how often are we surprised when they do? When we pray for

someone to get well, and they do, do we trust that God acted? It is so often hard for us to believe that God is acting in our midst.

Which brings us to our gospel story – another resurrection account – Jesus appears to the disciples after they have returned from Emmaus and are sharing their story of this latest encounter with the risen Jesus – and still they seem surprised and apprehensive!

In the preceding verses to our Gospel today, Cleopas and another disciple had been returning home along the road to Emmaus, back to their ordinary life – saddened by the fact that their greatest hopes have not come to pass. Maybe they were doubting the resurrection, maybe they began to suspect that the whole thing had been a mistake. But this was what they were talking about as they walked along.

They are so distracted by the story that they are telling, they don't even notice that they have become part of the story of the resurrection – as Jesus walks along with them. (*I suspect we may be able to recall moments in our own lives when the very thing that we are seeking, the very thing that we are trying to understand is before us all the time.*) Anyway, Cleopas and his companion share their stories as they walk along with this new stranger; and they don't even realise it is Jesus until they break bread together – in sharing in prayer and a meal – their eyes are opened and they know they have had their own resurrection encounter.

After Jesus is made real in the breaking of the bread he vanishes from their sight; they are so filled with hope and new vision that they rush back to Jerusalem to share their story with the others – this is where we join Luke's Gospel today.

And despite so many in the room now having seen Jesus; regardless of the enthusiasm of the story of Cleopas and his friends – when Jesus appears amongst them again – they are fearful and doubt their perception and reality. They are a people still grieving and even though at one level they want to believe that the resurrection is true – their human nature is that this cannot be possible.

Jesus speaks into this fear, speaks into this uncertainty – just as Peter will later do to those who have seen his miracle. Jesus challenges what is holding them back from seeing all that is possible – for embracing what God is doing amongst them.

Once Jesus addresses the disciple's fear – not only are their eyes opened, but their minds and hearts as well so they can understand the scriptures. But they had to let go of their own preconceptions to do this – and then he promises that they will go to the nations to spread the word – though not until the Holy Spirit has come upon them.

It is a strange ending and yet a wise one – when we allow our eyes to open; when we are able to let go of our own preconceptions; the danger is that we can become zealots – insight without wisdom is as dangerous as blindness –

and so Jesus begins to give the disciples insight but they must wait for the Holy Spirit to guide them in wisdom. For they have much work to do.

It is the same commission which is given to us; and it is a challenge because God acts in ways which sometimes outside our comfort zone. Sometimes letting go so we can see the reality before us takes great courage – but that is the gift of faith and our relationship with God.

As we continue our celebration of this Eastertide Jesus calls us to allow our eyes, our hearts and our minds to be open – to all that God wants us to see – and all that God is doing. To let go of what we expect might happen next, and to welcome where God is leading us. For we too, like the first disciples must learn to have faith. Amen.