

**Sermon preached by Rev'd Cynthia Jackson, 5th Sunday of Easter,
St. Mary's Wimbledon.**

11 women from St. Mary's attended the Diocesan prayer and spirituality day at Southwark Cathedral recently. The theme of the day was '*Awakening: Meeting the risen Jesus in daily life*'. What a scary thought?

What an inspiring day – over 250 Christians from all parts of the Diocese gathering together to worship and think about the Resurrection of Jesus and what it means to us today.

The Resurrection is about meeting Jesus in all sorts of situations. As Margaret Silf, who led one of the workshops on '*Resurrection for Real – Exploring the reality of resurrection in our lived experience*' told us the Resurrected Jesus did not force himself upon the individuals he met. He let them recognise Him. We see this with Mary Magdalene in the Garden, at the Empty Tomb. Mary thinks that Jesus is the gardener and it is only when Jesus calls her by name does she recognise him.

By the time we catch up with Peter in his encounter with the Gentiles in Joppa Peter has certainly changed out of all recognition. From denying Jesus three times, to being one of the foremost leaders of the early Christian Church, what could have been a more dramatic change? Fancy Jesus choosing someone who had betrayed him to lead his followers? When Peter encounters Jesus on the beach after a night of fishing but catching no fish Jesus is cooking breakfast! Not a judgemental encounter. Jesus does not judge Peter just asks him if he loves him and exhorts him to feed my sheep. Peter is empowered by Jesus and by the gift of the Holy Spirit. His life is turned right around.

Even so Peter is still rooted in the traditions of Judaism hence his reaction to the vision he receives in Joppa. How can he eat unclean food? But then Peter has his Epiphany moment when he hears God telling ;

'...What God has made clean, you must not call profane '.... (Acts: 10: 14)

On Peter's return to Jerusalem it was even more difficult for the Jewish Christians in to accept the fact that Gentiles in order to become Christians did not have to follow the Jewish rules about circumcision and food regulations. The gift of the Holy Spirit was sufficient. How revolutionary?

Jesus was a revolutionary, he was unconventional. Jesus ate with tax gatherers and sinners. Jesus moved people to a new way of thinking. The most important command that Jesus gave his disciples was that they love one another as we heard in Gospel reading :

" I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" . (John 13:34-35)

This is not a Eros type love but an Agape Love, a self-sacrificing love. It is not the type of love that looks for a reward, it is unconditional Love. Jesus the Christ showed us that throughout his life. How hard it has been for the Christian Church throughout the centuries to show that love and how hard it is for us today.

Today we as people of the Resurrection have to have a new way of living and looking at life. It is far easier for us to remain in our own comfort zones.

We are called as recipients of God's love to share that love with other people. I hope we all know what it means to be loved by another human being, be it father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife, partner or friend.

To be able to share God's love with other people we have to know that God loves us unconditionally. We do not have to earn God's love. Jesus gave his life on the cross to show us how much God loved the world – no other sacrifice can compare with that. We have to let go the control of our lives and let God in; we have to be able to forgive ourselves and let God's love into our lives.

Jesus loved each one of his disciples, including Judas. Jesus wanted his disciples to show forth that love in their lives. Jesus wants us to show forth his love to the people we meet each day.

We do not need to stand on a street corner with a placard proclaiming '*Jesus loves you*'.

I'd like to quote from the Bible Reading Fellowship notes on the 1st Letter of John:

'...Those who believe the testimony about Jesus know God because they have glimpsed the immensity of God's love, incarnate in Jesus. It is the church's calling and, therefore, are calling to trust that the revelation of the love of God in Christ is true, and reflect that love to the world in all that we say and do...' (1)

What a challenge?

An example of someone who has shown her love of God in their life is our own Queen Elizabeth II by her loving and dedicated service to our nation since she became Queen on the death of her father in 1952. We rejoice with her as she celebrates her 90th Birthday.

One way we can share the love of God with other people is by praying for them. Why am I surprised to be asked by people who profess to have no faith '*to pray for them*' in times of crisis. What a need there is for prayer in today's world bringing the Light of Christ into the dark places of the world.

We do not do any of this in our own strength but by the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. We move from our old way of living to the new as expressed in the words of the Sidney Carter hymn, '*One more step along the world I go*':

*"One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go.
From the old things to the new
keep me travelling along with you."*

It is not just an intellectual change that we have to make we have to have a living relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. This living relationship is like being giving the living water that is described in the Book of Revelation. ...

'...To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life...' (Rev.21:6b)

This was the living water that Jesus offered to the Samaritan woman at the well.

I'd like to finish by quoting a prayer from St. Teresa of Avila which sums up what I have been trying to say:

*'...Christ has no body now, but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth, but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which he looks
with compassion on this world.*

*Let nothing disturb you.
Let nothing frighten you.
All things pass away:*

*God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.*

*Those who have God
find they lack nothing;
God alone suffices. Amen.*

(1) *Guidelines – Bible Study for Today's Ministry and Mission – Jan-April 2016-*

1,2 and 3 John – Jon Riding.