

Acts 3: 12-26  
I John 3: 1-7  
Luke 24: 36b-48

In 1985, when I was 18/19, I was rather chuffed to be find myself invited for interview to read history at Bristol.

This, you need to understand, was after a far from illustrious school career.

So life was looking up.

Then came the interview and the question which could so easily have derailed my hopes there and then.

‘What did I think about dreams as a potential historical source?’

Ah, the young Gainsborough hadn’t thought about this.

‘Well, you’d need to record the dreams first’, I said.

Not bad.

‘But no’, the interviewer said, ‘that wasn’t a problem – so and so had recorded all their dreams’.

And so it went on...

I obviously didn’t make a complete fool of myself as I came to Bristol and, as they say, the rest is history.

Staying with the dream theme for a moment.

I dreamt the other day about my father.

Now to be clear that’s my biological father (!).

Who, some of you know, died just a few months ago.

The thing that was most lovely, and moving, about the dream was having my father physically present.

I put my head on his chest and told him how much I missed him.

Wisely or not, I recounted my dream to my mother – actually an edited version.

She expressed her sadness that she hadn’t dreamt about my father.

And that how, as life continues on, and she is no longer sharing it with him, my father feels further away.

I suggested, in reply, that maybe she is still close to my father but in a different way.

The interesting question is what does that mean?

As I have reflected on this episode – two people coming to terms with their loss...

...a fairly ordinary and ubiquitous life event, experienced by many/most of you no doubt, it struck me that I've probably stumbled into some knotty theological issues.

What joy!

Our reading from Luke – Luke chapter 24 – the third of a series of resurrection appearances in Luke.

The tomb.

The Emmaus road.

And the episode we heard today...

...take us into the heart of those turbulent, disorienting days.

The disciples were 'startled and terrified' (verse 37).

They were 'disbelieving in their joy' (verse 41)

(Which is a beautiful way of expressing conflicted emotions!)

The disciples thought they were seeing a ghost.

But they were not.

Luke is quite clear that they were not.

'Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' (verse 39)

Ghosts don't eat -- fish.

So, this is bodily resurrection.

And Christianity has been pretty insistent that this is so.

I believe in the resurrection of the body, we say whenever we recite the Creed (or some versions of it).

Never an easy notion to get our head around.

But why might this be so?

Why must it be so – that it is the resurrection of the body?

Bodies matter.

Our bodies matter.

What we do to bodies matters.

Think of all the issues around the commodification of bodies.

We are embodied, though we don't often stop to think about that very much.

But my word do we notice it when a loved one dies.

The physical absence.

But why else must it be a bodily resurrection?

God so loved the world that he sent his Son to live amongst us.

To take on flesh.

It would hardly make sense for Jesus to rise again, to defeat death, not in bodily form.

Though it is a strange body.

Recognisable but “too intense for common experience”.

“Not too tenuous but too intense to be accommodated within our common experience” as Herbert McCabe puts it. (God Matters, p. 112)

Bodies matter.

To us and to God.

But what does this all mean for us, for the Church and the world, for our discipleship?

What does it mean?

What does it imply?

“It is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Verses 46 and 47 of our gospel reading.

We are witnesses of these things.

Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed.

This is critical. In our risen life this is critical.

We are forgiven through God's act on the cross.

And in turn must be people – must be a Church – that transmits that same spirit of forgiveness to the world.

But what does that look like practically, I wonder, in our encounter with others?

It is surely something about connecting.

Affirming.

Being people who bring healing – in and through our relationships.

How do we do that?

By being present.

Being present to others is surely important.

This Easter season, when we celebrate the risen Christ, we are celebrating a new kind of presence.

Bodily presence.

Bodily life.

And a presence we encounter most vividly in the Eucharist.

This is my body broken for you.

And on the Emmaus road they recognised Jesus only in the breaking of the bread.

As we encounter Jesus in the Eucharist, catching a glimpse of what this means, so we see Jesus in the world.

In each other.

In all creation.

Perhaps I am right then.

To those whom we love and see no more, may be we are close to them in a different way.

But there is more.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but [one day] we will see face to face (1 Cor 13: 12).

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.