**Acts 3:12-19**

Peter addressed the people, ‘You Israelites, 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? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

‘And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,

**1 John 3:1-7**

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

**Luke 24:36b-48**

While the eleven and their companions were talking about what they had heard, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 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.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus 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. You are witnesses of these things.

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

‘During Lent, we work on repentance and preparing ourselves for walking the way of the cross with Jesus, in order to share in the resurrection joy when Easter arrives.

During the season of Easter, we should work with equal commitment on growing into the likeness of God, specifically by following the example of Jesus, who opens the scriptures to show us the way, the truth and the life, and who expects us to be witnesses to his resurrection.’ So says the Cambridge theologian, Cally Hammond, in her notes on today’s readings. They chimed with me in how closely they mirror the vision we wrote for St Peter’s School a couple of years ago:

**‘For the children to realise their God-given gifts and talents, and grow following the example of Jesus,’** which we paired with a quotation from Matthew’s gospel, where Jesus says to his disciples: ***With man this is impossible but with God all things are possible.***

In today’s gospel reading from Luke, we have his version of the resurrection appearance by Jesus to the disciples, in which he has to continue to assure them of his physical, bodily presence with them. His ‘hello’ is always: Peace be with you, and while in John’s gospel version of this story they are thrilled and delighted to see him, in this version they are terrified. They think they are seeing a ghost. And that seems to be a feature of Jesus’ resurrection body – at times it is recognisable and at times it is not (think about the Road to Emmaus); at times it can pass through doors and at times there is a definite solidity to it.

So Jesus resorts to the everyday act of eating – in this case a piece of grilled fish – to prove that solidity; to help them grasp the physical reality, in the same way as looking at the wounds in his hands confirmed the reality of how he had suffered for their sakes and ours.

Only when they are calmer are they in a position to listen to his teaching. Having opened their eyes to the physical, they can now open their minds to the scriptures. And there is my first point today: that this is an eternal standard – because this is not just a lesson for the disciples but also for us: that we should not decide what scripture means without first asking Jesus to open our minds to what he wants us to see and hear.

These readings from the Acts of the Apostles and from Luke’s gospel are recordings of one man’s understanding, reached by doing precisely that. Just to put that first reading in context: Peter and John have just healed a lame beggar and people are standing round gazing in wonder at this miracle they have performed, so Peter is explaining how they were able to do it. By way of reassurance, he first recalls the roots and history of their faith – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the same one who glorified Jesus – then he reminds them that they were responsible for having Jesus crucified in the first place – and finally he presses home the point that this miracle was performed in Jesus’ name, not in the disciples’ own strength. And then, having brought his listeners along with his story, Peter issues a challenge: maybe you didn’t understand what you were doing when you called for Jesus to be crucified, but now you do, you need to repent of your sins and turn to that same God, the God of our ancestors, who glorified Jesus and forgives your sins. That is sort of the Lenten bit for today. The penitential part.

It is strange to me however, that the Acts reading, the bit I have just called the penitential part – repent, therefore and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out – finishes where it does. Because the very next verse says: so that ‘times of refreshing’ may come upon you. In other words: yes, repent because that is important and necessary, but through that will come pouring forth the blessings of God, and God’s presence with you. And right there, we go past Lent and straight into Eastertide – the joy, the hope and the blessing that comes from following Jesus. We are called to be witnesses to the faith, but we are witnesses, not primarily to Lenten penitence, but to the life that comes from the resurrection. And we must not let repentance predominate over the blessings of faith.

Dogs, maybe all animals, sleep in two different ways: one, with one eye half-open, to be ready to defend themselves if necessary; and the other, deeply, soundly asleep, when they feel completely safe and don’t need to be watchful. Psalm 4, which is set for this morning, gives us a model for this: it begins with a statement of faith – Know that the Lord does wonders for the faithful; when I call upon the Lord, He will hear me. And then, based on that faith, the experience that ‘you have put gladness in my heart … I lie down in peace; at once I fall asleep; for only you, Lord, make me dwell in safety.’

The crux of faith is stuff that we cannot know. That is why what we have is called ‘faith’. As the letter to the Hebrews puts it: faith is the assurance of things hoped-for; the conviction of things not seen.

And while the Christmas story brings God to earth into human form, in a way that we can relate to, the Easter story encourages us to explore what the Creed, our statement of faith, calls ‘the life of the world to come’. If we are to be dogs who close both eyes, we need to nurture and develop our faith in that promise.

And conveniently, John the Epistoler – the writer of the Letter rather than the writer of the gospel – spells that out for us: there is a gap between what we know and what we can only imagine. We are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. But rewind a bit to the beginning of that passage: See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God. But then, in case that all seems a bit too fantastical, he emphasizes: for that **is** what we are.

And in the light of that, what is yet to come is even more glorious. We shall see God. God will be revealed; and we will be like him. After all, we were made in God’s image.

And so we commit ourselves today and every day to growing in the likeness of God, which we understand if we follow the example of Jesus, who opens the scriptures to us and helps us to understand the way; and the truth; and the life.

But just one final point: it is not enough to do this in isolation. Indeed, it is not possible to do it in isolation. Back to the gospel. Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures and then said: repentance and forgiveness is to be proclaimed to all nations. You are witnesses of these things.

Jesus’ Peace be with you is both a gift that allows us to sleep like the dog with both eyes closed, and a task: to bring that peace to the communities in which we live and work.

Which brings us absolutely full-circle. To realise; to use and develop our God-given gifts and talents in the service of God and all of God’s children, whoever and wherever they may be.

That is our blessing from God, and the blessing that we are called to be to the rest of the world.

**Amen**