

Sunday, April 18th. 2021. Easter 3

Acts 3, 12-19, Psalm 4, Luke 24, 36-48

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

Are you good at sleeping? I am, usually! Occasionally, I get a sleepless night, which seems like a week. It seems to happen when I am “slept out” and not tired, or if I have something on my mind, if there is a worry or if there is something important happening the next day.

Let’s look at Psalm 4 for a moment. It might be about a person of faith encouraging those, who have been disheartened by bad times. Here the speaker seems to be a poor person, who faces the lying accusations of the wealthy and a trial in the temple. He cries out to God for help.

‘Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness; you set me at liberty when I was in trouble; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.’

He is confident that God, who has heard him in the past, will respond again. ‘But know that the Lord has shown me his marvellous kindness; when I call upon the Lord, he will hear me.’

His consciousness of innocence and knowledge of God give him more joy than his enemies have from their material possessions. ‘You have put gladness in my heart, more than when their corn and wine and oil increase.’

So, he sleeps peacefully, confident of God’s protection, and lies down, probably in the temple, during the ordeal of the trial. ‘In peace I will lie down and sleep, for it is you, Lord, only, who make me dwell in safety.’

Underlying this psalm is the confidence of the writer that God will be with him and will protect him.

The first reading from Acts takes place after the healing of a lame man, and it gives rise to Peter’s sermon, in which we see the confidence of the apostles. Peter insists that the healing was performed, not by magical power, but by God. God raised Jesus, the servant, who has been glorified and is the Author of Life. Peter then explains that the crucifixion of Jesus was committed in ignorance, but was part of God’s plan. God therefore calls for repentance and conversion.

The Gospel story occurs only in Luke and has no parallel in the other Gospels. The story seems to be intended to show that the risen Jesus was not a ghost. It counters the idea that Jesus had only a physical body. So, Jesus is seen showing his hands and feet and eating a piece of fish. As in the passage from Acts, it is stressed that the death and resurrection of Christ are the fulfilment of the Old Testament. Christ is

not only its fulfilment, but also its interpreter, and this interpretation must be announced to the whole world. It is to begin in Jerusalem, and the disciples are to be the witnesses.

The disciples rightly believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but wrong in thinking that the Messiah would be a warrior king, who would overthrow the enemies of Israel and establish a rule of peace and justice. Rather, God's promise lay in their repentance and forgiveness. The disciples, paralysed by fear, were now to become a confident group, proclaiming the redeeming love and forgiveness of Jesus.

Where is God in our lives? Since the pandemic began last year, are we filled with grief at all that has happened? Or anger? Are we finding it difficult to see God active in this situation? Or is God now, one year on, inviting us to move on from that dark place, to allow us to embrace a new understanding of who Jesus is and how he is present with us? Can we see that God's love and compassion are real? Have we seen God active in the way people have come together, helped each other, discovered new ways, a new way of living? Has God brought us beyond 'the valley of the shadow of death', to quote Psalm 23, perhaps after illness, bereavement or loneliness, into healing and into seeing things a little differently? Is working from home in some ways an advantage, cutting down on commuting and allowing us to have more family life, and maybe helping us to protect the environment? Have we enjoyed having meetings on Zoom? Has this enabled us to talk to one another more than before? Is God healing us in a way that we can trust?

Like those disciples, we are called to witness to the living and loving God, as our Lent course showed us. That is what we see the apostles doing in Acts, and that is what Jesus was preparing them for in today's Gospel.

Does the story of God become our story and can we tell it? To go back to Psalm 4, can we sleep peacefully, knowing that God is always there, on our side, protecting us, guiding us through the ups and downs of life and asking us to share our story?

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