

SERMON – 18/4/21**'Felt or Telt?'**

Luke 24:36b-48

“They still could not believe.” (Luke 24:41)

It's just as well we are all different. The world would be a very dull place if we all looked the same, if we all thought the same, if we were all excited or depressed by the same things. For one person it is the thrill of a football match that makes their heart soar, for another it is the wonder of the natural world, for still another it is music or the arts. One person is bored to sleep by politics while another lives for the next election or debate. I'm told that some people get their kicks from simultaneous equations or a game of cricket while others would rather watch paint dry than either of those things. We shouldn't be at all surprised by the fact that each of us experiences God in a different way nor by the variety of ways in which people respond to God or worship God or serve the Lord.

Some folk cannot remember a time when they didn't believe in God while for every person who has come to faith in Christ as a result of careful study or reasoned thinking another has entered into the life of faith through an emotional response or an experiential journey.

I was struck in this morning's reading by the contrast between three very different possible responses to the same encounter with the risen Jesus, what might be called the emotional, the tangible and the intellectual, and it got me thinking about what it might take for different people to believe. I have given this morning's sermon a title in Scots just to send Kathy on her way from among us to her new charge with a little bit of the vernacular ringing in her ears – I have entitled it: 'Felt or Telt' thinking about how for some faith is something that they *feel* (and that could be emotionally or even physically felt) while for others God is one about whom they have been *telt* (that is to say 'told' in words and thoughts and ideas). I wonder how it is *you* came to believe and I wonder how we might more imaginatively help others to believe, especially those who may see the world very differently from the way we each do.

First of all, there are quite a number of words in this morning's passage about the feelings that were experienced by those who came suddenly and

unexpectedly face to face with the risen Lord Jesus. They were *terrified* we are told and Christ asked them 'Why are you *alarmed*?' and said to them 'Peace be with you'. Some people wear their emotions on their sleeve. One person would be deeply touched by an expressive appeal that tugged at their heart-strings whereas another would dismiss such an appeal as manipulative. While we would not have expected to see the Queen in tears at yesterday's funeral (it is not her way) we are all different - someone else in similar circumstances would certainly have been very visibly upset, inconsolable even. What is appropriate for one would not be for another. Maybe you are the kind of person who likes to dance in worship or to greet others with a hug, or perhaps you express your worship in seated stillness or on your knees and your greetings with a nod or a handshake. Is one right and the other wrong? Is one style better than another? Of course not. We're all different and we express ourselves differently.

But emotions (whether expressed or repressed) can also be a barrier to belief – perhaps we might be inclined to think someone would hold back from taking a step of faith if they were terrified or alarmed, or indeed if they were anxious or sad or depressed – but actually what we read here is that they still could not believe because of *joy* and *wonder* (v.41). It is actually an *exuberant* response to seeing the risen Christ that stops them believing. And how Jesus leads them on from that is by taking his disciples out of the realm of emotional feelings into feelings that were much more tangible. If there are quite a number of emotional words in this passage there are also a number of words associated with the senses: *Look* at my hands and my feet says Jesus; *see* that it is I myself; *feel* me and you will *know*, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have. One person may be perfectly satisfied with someone's testimony while another looks for something visible or audible and still another may feel the need to reach out for harder evidence or tangible proof. If we think back to last week's passage about Thomas, Jesus responded to his need for proof and here again today we see the Lord offering His disciples something more than the sight of him before their eyes and the opportunity to reach out and touch His body – He asks for something to eat and on being given some fish He eats it in their presence that they might know he was no mere apparition.

Now we have to recognise that, as Jesus said to Thomas in last week's reading 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed' we

face different circumstances today than the first disciples did at a time when the risen Jesus still walked the earth in resurrected flesh and bone. On the one hand some have a need for 'felt' evidence, be that an emotional encounter with Christ that warms their heart or stirs their spirit until laughter bursts forth or tears flow, or be it some kind of physical token of the reality of the risen Christ, but we also have to acknowledge that as well as 'felt' evidence there is 'telt' evidence, the message that had been prophesied from before He came, the message that He both spoke and embodied and the message that has been proclaimed by His followers ever since, and here Christ not only responds to the emotional and the tangible longings of some of those He came to, but also the intellectual or the cerebral needs of others.

In the face of the doubts that rose in the minds of those who encountered Him that day, Jesus reminded them of the things He Himself had told them about while He was with them, He reminded them that everything written about Him in the Law of Moses, the writings of the prophets and the Psalms had to come true and perhaps most significantly of all He 'opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.' Now I freely admit that I am one of those people who likes to *think* about things rather than to *feel* them (although I am fully aware that others have precisely the opposite experience and need God to be *felt* rather than *telt*). I wouldn't be doing the job that I do unless I thought there was great value in expounding the Law, the Prophets and the Writings of the Old Testament, preaching the teachings of Jesus the Christ, and calling upon God the Holy Spirit to open people's minds to understand what is written in the Scriptures, because time and again I have seen people come face to face with the risen Lord as the Word of God has been proclaimed and reflected on. But I also know that just because the message of the Gospel is 'telt' doesn't mean to say that it is necessarily 'felt' and so I will also do whatever I can to allow people who are more likely to respond to an emotional message or something that is more hands on and practical than intellectual.

So what does it take for you to believe? And what does it take for the next person to believe? The risen Jesus is among us all though unseen, not only in this building but wherever each one who is listening to this may be right now. This risen Jesus says to you as He said to those He encountered that day we have read about: 'Peace be with you.' If fear or anxiety or joy or wonder or sadness or boredom or doubt are preventing you from putting

your trust in God, then maybe there's another way. Hear His invitation to you anew this morning to reach out to Him physically and to find tangible assurance that He is there – you may find that in a surprising manner, perhaps through a word in season, the touch of a loved-one, a phone call from a friend or a stranger. If you seek Him you *will* find Him – it just may not be how you expect to. And conversely if the spoken word of the intellectual sermon leaves you untouched (or untelt) then ask God to reach out to you in a way that will minister to your needs, to embrace your soul, to make your heart skip a beat, to immerse you in the love from which nothing can ever separate you.

Even with the risen Christ right in front of their eyes, we're told, some *couldn't* believe, at least not to begin with, but the witnesses of those things were the ones who ultimately took the Good News to the ends of the earth and through them millions have been telt and have felt the love of Christ and the victory of Christ.

“They still couldn't believe” – is that where you are this morning? Then be assured there are other ways to find faith in Christ than perhaps you have experienced thus far. God knows you completely for who you are and if you are open to meeting the risen Jesus then you surely will.