

## *Isolation Radio Talk*

**Life feels; life responds. He was; he is.**

Good Morning

The sure test that something is alive is whether that something responds to a stimulus or not. In 24 Hours in A&E they check the heart rate; lift an eyelid; shine a torch into the eye; if the pupil contracts against the sudden light, that is a sign life is there. Life feels; life responds. If you have a health check, the Doctor may take a little rubber hammer and hit you just below the kneecap. If your leg gives a good jerk you are alive and, yes, kicking; if it just hangs there with no reaction, the Doctor wonders what is wrong. Life feels; life responds, and whatever does not feel and respond, is either dead or at best half-alive.

Now, a question for you. What one word would you choose to describe the personality of Jesus Christ? 'Loving' might be the best; possibly too sentimental; Jesus was not sentimental. 'Good' perhaps? Much too vague; anyway, he said he did not much like being called 'good'. 'Holy', then; that makes him sound unapproachable; it does not match what we know; those around him, who were most keen on holiness did not think he qualified. I could go on, but you might have guessed I already have a satisfactory word. 'Alive' that is the word I want to use. Think of him as the man - that is the best way - who strides through the Gospels as someone completely alive. The glorious wide-awake aliveness of Jesus is what obviously struck the people who knew him. "In him was life," says John, in his gospel (John 1.4). "To whom can we go?" asks Peter, "You have the words of eternal life" (John 6.68).

The aliveness of Jesus was so strong it was infectious. When they were with him other people found themselves coming to life. If you press me, I think this was the secret of his miracles. Sick folk, settled in their sickness, hope of recovery lost, were galvanised into believing that, after all, they might become whole. Faith revived when Jesus was with them. Fainthearted believers who still look for a Kingdom of justice and peace, but think it far off, find that in Jesus' company they can dare to begin living that future dream here and now. After half an hour's talk with Jesus, a woman saw herself more truly than ever before; practical working men saw the prospect of an entirely different career before them; 'Follow me', said Jesus; 'they left their nets and followed him', say the Gospels (Mark 1.17-18; Matthew 4.19-20). The extraordinary creative power of the aliveness that was in Jesus is summed up in a phrase in St. John's Gospel, "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14.19).

He is life. That is what amazed the Samaritan woman, who met Jesus at a well on a hot sunny day (John 4.1-42); and it was not proper for a Jew to be seen even talking to her. She did not understand the play on words about water and life. Jesus offered her the water of life; she wanted that water; of course she did; who would not? Think what it would mean to her; and look down the ages, generation after generation. You see, if you look carefully with eyes of faith, people drink deeply of an unseen reality; they still do. Jesus is still alive.

How does the Christian work with that? Remember, this Lent, in your mind's eye, you follow Jesus into the desert; there is no road; you make it as you go; you look for support. Christians find that in God; what God has done; what God is still doing.

You can never ever know how it was a church was established in our small communities here in Ubley, Blagdon and Compton Martin. The gospels were written less than 500 years before Augustine's Monks moved west from Canterbury; when they came to Somerset, amazingly, they found Christians from the Celtic West of the country already here. Did they pitch their tent where now our ancient churches stand? Let your imagination tell the story. Did the first Christian Church, built from wood and wattle replace a pagan shrine? Time, prayer, worship; the joy and sorrows of life; living and dying has made the ground on which our Church family homes now stand, Holy. Do these sermons in stone; places where stranger or pilgrim can listen to the wind of the spirit add their prayers to those who still pray there and those long gone. Yes, they are still holy today; and I believe you can be holy to and tell the story; you can live as Christ lives; you can love God by serving each other in God's name; and tell the story.

I want you to be clear how much you owe to the faithfulness of the past. Many today have lost touch with faith in God; Christians today must give them signs, symbols, encounters with the faith; faith that is alive because Jesus is alive. Your story is about a living faith; your story must be told by the living and not the dead.

The destination of your desert journey is God; each of you may search out a different path; history and tradition may be shared; inner needs are fed by the sacrament of bread and wine, by the word of scripture, by the fellowship of the Church as the one body of Christ, living now - past, present and future - here on earth. All can be nourished. When the people of the gospels met our Lord and Saviour, they met him at a particular point in time and Jesus met their need; whether it was about being fed; asking a question; seeking healing; understanding the Gospel. The Samaritan woman, a foreign woman, wondered if he could possibly be the Messiah. He was – he is.

For you, pilgrim in the desert, I end with part of a poem, written by an English Poet, Minnie Louise Haskins written over a century ago; it seems to say it all:

'I said to the man who stood at the gate,  
'Give me a light that I may enter darkness',  
and he said to me,  
'There shall be no light given you;  
but go out into the dark;  
put your hand into the hand of God;  
that shall be to you brighter than a light;  
and surer than a known way'.

Lord, may we all  
walk with you hand-in-hand,  
through the ups and downs of our lives.  
Amen.

Thank you for listening