



## **SEEING IS BELIEVING – Sunday 14 April 2024**

**Luke 24: 36-48**

**Acts 3: 1-2, 6-8, 11-19**

In Luke 24, we have Jesus appearing to the disciples who are reported as terrified as they thought they were seeing a ghost!

And Jesus 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 I have”.

But seeing Jesus didn’t immediately lead to believing, so He asks if they have anything to eat. So they gave him a piece of broiled fish and He ate it in their presence.

Elsewhere in the Gospels and particularly in John’s Gospel, Chapter 20, Jesus after convincing Thomas that He was alive and well is reported as saying (v 29) “Have you believed, because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe”.

Without directly contradicting these words attributed to Jesus, I want to claim in a broader sense that seeing is believing; that unless people see some sign of God in Christ’s presence in us and in God’s wider world, people will not believe.

- Throughout Jesus’ ministry, He showed in His teaching and healing practical signs of God’s power – and people seeing this believed.
- Similarly in the life of the early Church, those signs of God’s power and presence continued as recorded in such passages as those earlier read, Acts 3, where the Apostle Peter healed a crippled beggar and justified it as God in Christ’s power, not his own. And equally powerful in the early Chapters of the

Book of Acts was the sharing in common of possessions which had such an impact on others that they too joined up with the early Church.

So it was said 'Look how these Christians love one another'.

And you and I – how did we come to faith? Most likely through role models we observed such as parents, youth leaders or others.

Some may have had a more miraculous experience.

As a young farmer in Taranaki, I had contact again with Bruce Barnitt, a past teacher at Wesley College who was now teaching at New Plymouth Boys' High – and one time as we discussed faith issues, Bruce told me of the night before he was to be imprisoned as an ardent pacifist during WWII. He was greatly troubled and, in great anguish, not unlike Jesus on the cross, he cried out to God – and in the darkness of his bedroom, he told me, Jesus was suddenly there. Nothing was said but a great peace flowed through Bruce and he faced the next day of imprisonment calmly and resolutely. Few of us may have had such an experience, but many of us will have seen or heard or felt something that moved us to faith, and on into continuing action.

Seeing indeed is believing.

And what about others in this sceptical and secular age? What will bring others to faith? Simply, it may be no more than what they see in us – both individually and collectively.

A number of my close friends and fellow activists are non-believers. They call me a 'God Botherer' to which I reply God's bothered about the lot of us!

But often there are small openings, not unlike Leonard Cohen who sang about the cracks that let the light in – there are often small openings that enable the penny to drop and an opportunity is provided.

For 12 years, I was a part-time chaplain to a number of work places through the Churches' Work Place Support, historically known as ITIM. – Workplaces as varied as the Eco-Depots here in Christchurch to Landcare and NIWA while in ministry in Nelson. Sometimes, through week by week visits, it took over two years before some staff would open up to you. I remember 9/11 particularly when the morning after that attack on the USA, I visited NIWA. Over morning tea, a number of staff opened up with their fears of travelling to the US where they often went to conferences to deliver research papers. One scientist, who I had

never managed to connect with significantly, said to me after morning tea that he now understood why management wanted me there week by week.

People are watching us, and not only as individuals, but also collectively as Church.

And a lot of what they see as Church today they don't like; Destiny's antics, Gloriavale's slavery, sexual abuse in the Church.

Seeing these things has led to massive unbelief. So how do we help turn this around?

Fortunately it doesn't all depend on us. God in Christ's resurrected power continues to be present. But for our part, individually we have to be on our mettle – being the best representatives of Jesus we can be.

And collectively as a congregation, what does that mean?

Knox has a very fine tradition of inclusiveness – all are welcome here; all can belong. And through sound worship and teaching both in here and what is offered as extras through Len and others, combined with the pastoral care that Norman and Linda along with others offer, and together with good governance and administration – thank you Janice and Lynda and other officers and Parish Council – the mix is good.

But what about our impact as a progressive congregation on a sceptical and increasingly secular city?

The Social Issues Committee's advocacy of the Living Wage has been great, but what else might we engage in during this year, and as a counter to some of the negativity gaining momentum in wider society; policies likely to disrupt positive aspects of race relations and policies likely to lead to greater inequality and division.

It's great that we provide food and other essentials to Te Whare Roimata and host AA and Tangata Atumotu, but could we go deeper with such groups in relationships and support that the wider community might see and also benefit from – and from such seeing might they in fact discover a belief in what we are about?

Might others in essence see and believe?

So be it, Amen