

SERMON AT YORK: 9/4/97: EASTER 3: GEOFF CHADWICK:

"WE HAD THE EXPERIENCE BUT MISSED THE MEANING."

TS Eliot wrote in one of his verses: "We had the experience but missed the meaning." This, I think is a suitable summary of the bible readings today. "We had the experience but missed the meaning." (*Four Quartets* (3)ptII)

In the Acts reading we hear Peter preaching to the people: "I know that you [crucified Jesus] in ignorance, as did also your rulers... Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out... (Acts 3: 17-19, NRSV.) Peter here is making a plea for the people to understand the events of Good Friday and Easter day. They had the experience of crucifixion, and they had the experience of the revitalised disciples; but whether they were able to understand the meaning of these experiences was another matter. Many of the people had had the experience but had missed the meaning.

The Gospel reading takes a similar tack. The disciples are all together in one place and the resurrected Jesus appears to them. What an amazing experience that would have been! Even so, the meaning is almost lost on them. Hear again what happened:

- a) They thought they were seeing a ghost.
- b) He showed them his hands and his feet.
- c) He ate the broiled fish
- d) He explained everything to them.

The disciples were experiencing the risen Christ but there were in danger of missing the meaning. Christ had to convince them through several means: he had to show them his wounds, eat fish and give a long bible study so that the meaning of his resurrection would be known. "... he opened their minds to understand the scriptures..." (Acts 3: 45, NRSV.) All of this points to the fact that they could have had the Easter experience but missed the meaning.

Perhaps our modern Easters have become like that. We all get the Easter holiday but we don't all necessary grasp its meaning. For many people the four day break has become a time for holiday, travelling, chocolate and Easter bunnies. Sure, Easter is known to have some religious background but just what its meaning is, is lost. So many, I think, have the Easter holiday experience but miss the meaning.

But we must not just point the finger at those who didn't go to church over Easter because, we, just like those bewildered disciples can have an Easter experience and miss the meaning. By Easter experience I mean an encounter with the risen Lord. Such an encounter could take various forms. It could be a "lightning bolt" experience or it could be some other gently warming experience that has breathed new life into us or others. It could be a time to reflect on the meaning of one's life, or it could be in the reconciliation of a long standing argument. It could also come in the eating of a meal with someone where the ordinary human-ness of the other is revealed. It could come in the revelation of wounds. Sometimes when we reveal our scars to another we are resurrected. New life is given to us because in the revealing of the wounds they were able to be healed.

The risen Jesus commanded his disciples that: "...repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in [the Messiah's] name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem" (Lk 24: 47, NRSV.) Well, we are a long way from Jerusalem and we have heard the message. How wonderful it is that have been those who have had the experience and understood the meaning.

Can we pass on the meaning? Will the now unknowing come to realise that the risen Lord is not a ghost, that the risen Lord knows and understands the experience of wounding, that the risen Lord is real enough to eat fish with us, and that the risen Lord is a source of understanding? Well, let us hope so. May those we come in contact with be able to say:

"I had the experience and I got the meaning."

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**