

Following Christ

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Preacher: Barbara Darling

[0 : 00] Let's pray. Lord our God, give us faith to receive your word, understanding to know what it means, and the will to put it into practice, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

It's good to be back here again with you this evening, as Andrew said for the first time since his induction. I do hope you're all enjoying his leadership here. As well as Jono and all the rest, with no doubt some changes and some new ideas and some adjustments.

It's great to see that there are people continuing to grow in their faith, to hear Megan's story, and stepping forward to being confirmed in their faith and to be willing to be received into the Anglican part of the Christian church, for perhaps a variety of reasons.

For Megan, for Matt and Matthew, and all of us here tonight, we're all at various stages of following Christ, and we pray that this evening will be a very special time for our three candidates, their families and their friends.

Some of you might share with me a love for jigsaws, a great activity for a day like today, a rainy day and particularly on holidays.

[1 : 24] Have you noticed how jigsaws can really get you in? As you go past, you pop one piece in here and one in there. Twenty minutes later you're still standing there and the picture is quickly taking shape.

At other times you can hunt and hunt for the right piece and it just won't be there. You have a break and you come back an hour later and that missing piece is so obvious that you go straight to it.

Or else someone comes along, immediately selects that elusive piece that you just couldn't find. They can find it straight away. As you get towards the end, two things can happen.

There can seem to be insufficient pieces and you think you're going to run out and there won't be enough. And you can be worried about that. Or there seem to be far too many pieces and you think you're never going to fit them all in.

Usually, however, it all works out and there's exactly the right number except for one of my golden oldies that my father made some spare pieces because we'd lost some.

[2 : 23] So he actually crafted some and we knew where those bits lived. The tricky little pieces that don't seem to fit in anywhere suddenly just have the right slot when they're turned around the right way.

Well, it seems to me a little bit like that for the apostles with the death and the resurrection of Christ. Things that they couldn't understand before or didn't seem to fit begin to make sense.

Jesus had talked to them about going up to Jerusalem and the temple being destroyed and built again three days later. He had assured them that his kingdom was not of this world and he'd quoted various Old Testament passages that they couldn't fully understand.

Gradually, as the pieces came together, they can see more and more of the big picture and how all the pieces fit together. Well, today's Gospel reading that we heard from the last chapter of Luke helps to solve some of the puzzle about Jesus having died but being raised again.

The two who had gone along the road to Emmaus and had walked with Jesus and later recognised him when he stopped to eat with them came rushing back to Jerusalem to share with their friends the excitement of their encounter with Jesus.

[3 : 42] It was while that they were talking to the disciples they realised that Jesus was actually in their midst, giving them the beautiful Jewish greeting of shalom or peace.

The disciples really needed some peace right then. They must have felt anything but peaceful as they heard the incredible reports from Peter and the two from Emmaus and then they realised that Jesus was with them even though no one had opened the locked doors to him.

First they thought they must have been seeing a ghost yet this ghost proceeded to prove that he had a very substantial body by saying, come and touch me and do you have some food that I can eat?

He then ate some grilled fish. His body bore the marks of crucifixion yet he seemed to be able to transcend the usual physical laws and to be there one moment and not there the next.

When the disciples heard the invitation of Jesus to touch him and his request for food they were filled with joy and wonder. One translation says, they were still unconvinced, still wondering for it seemed too good to be true.

[5 : 04] Jesus was aware of their doubts and acknowledged that it was alright to have doubts and to be careful but in this case it was true. He showed them by his behaviour and his actions that he was the risen Lord and that he knew and understood each of them.

He showed them that he looked somehow different but he could still eat the fish. He was certainly not a Casper ghostly type figure.

Jesus then went on to speak about the past and what had happened to him, the present and what they were to do and the future, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the spreading of the Gospel.

When talking about this he showed them how the jigsaw pieces fitted together and so made up the total picture. He explained how the writings in the three major parts of the Old Testament tied together, the law of Moses, the writing of the prophets and the Psalms.

As he explained how they interconnected the disciples began to see what was written in the scriptures and why. They could see the Messiah's need to suffer, to die and to rise again from the dead.

[6 : 22] The message of repentance and forgiveness of sins to be preached to all people beginning with the first witnesses and then others in Jerusalem.

The things they couldn't understand before began to make sense to them as they could see God's plan and purpose unfolding. The first apostles were given here four guiding lights or guidelines for their Christian life and faith so that they could follow Christ.

These guidelines are for us as well in our living today and for strength for our journey, for those being received and those being confirmed and for each of us as we continue to follow Christ.

They're guidelines for parents and godparents of little ones when they're baptised, guidelines for those new to the Christian faith or being confirmed in that faith and guidelines for those who have faithfully been following their Lord for many years and may recently have been going through some times of difficulty or questioning.

They're guidelines that have sustained many people including me through difficult times. The first guideline Jesus says to them in Luke is to keep to the biblical truths.

[7 : 46] In verse 45 he says, Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures. What they saw and heard was scripturally true and fitted in with God's word revealed in the Bible first in the Old Testament and then later on in their time as it was written down in the New Testament.

They checked that the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and what was said about this fitted in with the biblical principles.

They saw the fulfilment in the passion of our Lord of the quotations from the Psalms about the cornerstone being rejected, the vinegar being given to drink and the terrible cry from the cross.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? They knew the passages from Isaiah about the suffering servant and they saw the quotations from the book of Hosea.

Through all of this we can see Jesus' life, death and resurrection were the fulfilment of the scriptures. We today need to continue this reliance on biblical truths, knowing what they are and how they affect us.

[9 : 03] This means knowing and studying the Bible through sermons, Bible studies, regular reading of the Bible and not being afraid to ask intelligent questions and to deepen our faith as we grow in this and in other ways.

So the first guideline is scripture. The second guideline is mission. Jesus wants his followers to reach out to share the good news with others and to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins which means salvation for all people.

This is for the whole world, not just for the Jews. We are encouraged by this to think beyond our immediate family and friends and parish in our neighbourhood, our wider city and overseas.

Missionaries are sent out to share the good news overseas or in more remote parts of Australia. We need people prepared to do that also here in the southern states of Australia.

We now have evangelists coming from Africa and other countries to Australia and the Western world to encourage us in our faith. We have so much to learn from their faith and enthusiasm.

[10 : 21] I know when I was working at Dandenong we had a group of Sudanese people there who'd been through much difficulty and their faith stood out like a beacon and they could teach us a great deal and they're continuing to do so.

Some people have gifts to be like the Apostle Andrew inviting others to come and to meet Jesus as Megan said a friend invited her to come along here to come to church or discussion or meditation groups.

Others can share with people how God has worked in their lives. We need to look at the picture or the jigsaw of our Christian life and see how reaching out and sharing the good news of Christ with others will fit in with this big picture.

Having this goal to reach out and share the good news of Christ with others means being an outward looking church not inward looking. It means continuing to encourage your young people and their teachers in children's church or Sunday school supporting those teaching CRE in our schools continuing the ministry with the Chinese congregations and trusting the power of the Holy Spirit at work today in our lives individually and corporately.

It means rejoicing in your support of missions and continuing to support CMS and other missionary organisations and those who serve with them including of course your previous vicar Paul Barker teaching the Bible in Asian countries.

[11 : 53] So our second guideline that our Lord gives us is mission. scriptures and mission. Thirdly apostolic action. We have an apostolic authority for our guidance that is relying on what the apostles have taught us that we believe and we proclaim as biblical truths that things that are based on the teaching of the apostles or the first followers of Christ.

They alone were the witnesses of these things. Peter and John and the others met with the risen Lord. They were able to say to others it was so because I heard and saw it.

They were given a divine commission by God to speak in this way. So the teaching of the twelve became the content of the New Testament which was affirmed by the twelve even if others wrote some of it down.

Their testimony provided a guideline for the truth when different points of view were put forward. We must trust in the apostolic authority for this good news and for the truths that we still inherit and pass on today.

And finally the witness of the early apostles became combined with that of the Holy Spirit as verse 49 says I am sending you the promise of my Father upon you but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

[13 : 24] The last guideline therefore is that of the power of the Holy Spirit. The church must be more than just a collection of people meeting together for their own ends.

It needs something to do with God and therefore with the Holy Spirit who is active in our own age and society as well as in the lives of those in the early church.

We have the wonderful promise of the power of God's Holy Spirit giving us the strength to go on. Confirmation is a special time where we pray for God's Holy Spirit to be with those affirming their faith in God Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And so God gives to his early disciples and to us these four guiding lights to show us the way as we follow Christ and I hope these four will be special in the lives of Matthew and Matt and Megan.

Scripture, mission, apostolic action and the Holy Spirit. As the early disciples rejoiced to see the risen Lord and how his presence solved many mysteries in their plan so too we can trust that there is a master plan for the jigsaw and see it gradually build up and make a whole scene with these guidelines helping us.

[14 : 48] these are guidelines especially for Megan confirming her faith today to encourage you to keep growing in your relationship with Christ. We rejoice with you we'll stand with you as you do this and with Matt and Matthew as they are received into the Anglican Church and with each other as we too seek to come closer to our risen Lord and Saviour and to follow him in our actions and our attitudes.

Let us pray. Amen. Lord Jesus Christ thank you for your encounter after the resurrection with your disciples and their growing understanding of who you were and who you are.

We pray that each of us may be like the apostles and meet with you to listen to you understand you more know your love in our lives and go out and share this love with others.

We pray this in your name. Amen.