

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

A sermon preached at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Sandhurst on Sunday 28th April 2019 by Emma Hodge

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

I want to start this sermon with a question, but don't worry this isn't the interactive sermon and I'm not expecting an answer, rather it is something to think about.

What does the APCM have to do with our gospel reading?

It may seem that the group of disciples in that locked upper room, shortly after the very first Easter, before they had received the Holy Spirit has little to do with an established community of Christians, living in Sandhurst in the twenty-first century and indeed the culture of the two groups are very different. However there are two similarities I want to draw your attention to today.

The first is **answers**.

At our APCM today, many of you will be coming along to find out the answers to some questions you may have about how St. Michael and All Angels is run and what our priorities will be over the next year. Questions you may have may include

- What is happening with "Faith in Action"
- Who will be on the PCC, Deanery Synod and Churchwardens
- What about the finances?
- And here I am going to stop as I don't want to go through all of the APCM agenda!!!

The group who met in the upper room, shortly after that first Easter would have also had a lot of questions and searching for answers as they discussed the questions. Some of the questions may have been...

- How will the Jewish and Roman Authorities treat us (and our families) now?
- Did it really happen, was what Mary Magdalene had said true? (In John's account, the risen Jesus appears only to Mary Magdalene as she stays behind at the empty tomb after the others have departed)
- Is this the last time we will all be together?
- What happens now?

Into this discussion, some of which would have been understandably fearful, Jesus appears. (Well that answers the question about if what Mary Magdalene said was true!) Jesus also gives the disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit as well as the message that they are to be sent.

We have also received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the instruction which Jesus gave his disciples all those years ago, equally applies to us, we are to interact with others, which includes telling others about Jesus. In John's account, the emphasis is on whether sins are forgiven or not; however if we look at Matthew's account of the same event the message is to go out and make disciples of everyone.

Jesus sends his disciples out, and we are also sent out. Not as individuals but as a community; and this leads me onto the second similarity between the disciples in the upper room just after the first Easter and our APCM later today.

My second point is **Community**.

The disciples were a community. They were a group of people, who had been following Jesus for a period of time, listening and trying to understand everything he said. The disciples community was not just about a group of people in the same situation, there would have been some that had been with him from the beginning, while others were more recent disciples. Today community is defined as "A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common"¹ however this is not the definition that would have been used at Jesus' time. Community was then more about social structure, stability and order and to the Jews in Jerusalem at that first Easter, Worship was a central part of the community.

The disciples were a community, they supported each other by getting together after the first Easter when they were afraid of the Jews.

St. Michael's is also a community but what kind of community are we? On an individual basis, this answer will be different for each of us, depending a lot on who we are, where we are in our lives, including in our faith life. Some of us will just come to St. Michael's on some Sunday's and not really engaging with the other people at St. Michael's unless they happen to be in another aspect of our lives. For others, St. Michael's is not just a place to come and worship on Sunday but a place where they provide support to others and often receive support in return.

As individuals, there is no right or wrong answer to what kind of community we are and it is not necessary the most important aspect as individuals. However, if we take the question not just as an individual but as corporate, then the question needs exploring further, as to answer what kind of community we are, we need to look at it from different people's viewpoints, from those who have been attending St. Michael's for a long time, for those who have only started to come and those we don't attend regularly.

Do people just see us as a worshipping community, not really engaging with the topics and issues in the world and that challenges that people face on a day to day basis?

¹ Oxford Dictionary

Or

Do people see us a community, which at the heart has worship, but is full of activities to support and encourage one another both young and old, a community which engages with the challenges of the world today, whether that is environmental concerns, raising a family, helping schools with the national curriculum, supporting charities those both near and far, a community that welcomes and values everyone whoever they are, a community that welcomes new people into the community;

- Which of these two communities would you like to belong to?
- Which of these two communities would you say St. Michael's is? And this may not be a straight forward answer (but for more information you will need to come along to the APCM).

The writer of Revelation stated this *"I am the Alpha and the Omega" says the Lord God, who is, and was and who is to come, the Almighty.*

Alpha and Omega is the Greek for beginning and the end. As a church, we have been here for 800 years. We have witnessed many beginnings and endings of individuals, of fashion, of how lives have been lived but the one constant is God.

St. Michael's has always been, and will always be a place where people come to worship the one God, but if we are a community who just comes together to worship God and to mark personal beginnings and endings, is this enough?

Is this what Jesus intended when he appeared to those disciples in the locked upper-room, reassured them that He had indeed been raised from the dead, gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit and told them to go out into the world?

Is that what Jesus intends from us as we are also his disciples? Will we work both as individuals and as a church to be the kind of church, the kind of community which God wants us to be?