

Sunday 15th April 2018. Third of Easter. Canongate Kirk.

St Luke 24:36-48 *Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself.*

The story is told of how, several centuries ago, the Pope decreed that all the Jews had to convert to Christianity or leave Italy. There was a huge outcry from the Jewish community, so the Pope offered a deal. He would have a religious debate with the leader of the Jewish community. If the Jews won, they could stay in Italy, if the Pope won, they would have to convert or leave. The Jewish people met and selected an aged but wise Rabbi to represent them in the debate. However, as the Rabbi spoke no Italian and the Pope spoke no Yiddish, they all agreed that it would be a *silent* debate. On the chosen day, the Pope and the Rabbi sat opposite each other for a full minute before the Pope solemnly raised his hand and showed three fingers. The Rabbi looked back and raised one. Next, the Pope waved his finger around his head. So the Rabbi pointed to the ground where he sat. Then the Pope brought out a communion wafer and a chalice of wine. The Rabbi responded by pulling out an apple from his pocket. With that, the Pope suddenly stood up and declared that he was beaten, that the Rabbi was too clever for him, and that the Jews could stay after all.

Later, the Cardinals met with the Pope, asking what had happened. The Pope said, *“First, I held up three fingers to represent the Trinity. He responded by holding up one finger to remind me that there is still only one God common to both our beliefs. Then, I waved my finger to show him that God was all around us. He responded by pointing to the ground to show that God was also right here with us. Finally I pulled out the wine & wafer to show that God absolves us of all our sins. He pulled out an apple to remind me of original sin. He had me beaten & I couldn’t continue.”* Meanwhile the Jewish community gathered around the Rabbi. *“How did you win the debate?”* they asked. *“I haven’t a clue,”* said the Rabbi. *“First he said to me that we had three days to get out of Italy, so I wagged my finger at him, no way! Then he tells me that the whole country would be cleared of Jews and I said to him, we’re staying right here.”* *“And then what?”* asked a woman. *“Who knows?”* shrugged the Rabbi, *“He took out his lunch, so I took out mine.”*

In order to avoid any such confusion after his resurrection Jesus took out his lunch too. Or, to be more accurate, and more serious, he asked them *“Have you anything here to eat?”* They offered him a piece of fish they had cooked, St Luke tells us, which he took and ate before their eyes. So there could be no doubt, no confusion, no mixed messages, no crossed wires. And at last, as he ate the piece of cooked fish, the disciples seem to have understood and accepted that he had after all risen from the dead. They had taken some persuading. Startled and terrified, thinking they were seeing a ghost, incredulous and astounded are just some of the expressions St Luke uses in these few short lines that tell of the final visit Jesus made to Upper Room. Suddenly there he was standing among them. Startled and terrified, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said *Why are you so perturbed? Why do doubts arise in your minds? Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself.* The hands and feet of course are still raw with the scars of the crucifixion days earlier, the incontrovertible evidence of what they all knew him to have so recently endured. They had watched with their own eyes, listened with their own ears, as the nails were driven in and Jesus was fixed, cruelly, crudely, to the cross. *Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see – he continues; no ghost has flesh and bones as you can see that I have.* He is himself right enough, against all the odds, the old familiar self that they have come to know and love, standing there before them as proof of everything he had ever tried to tell them, everything he had ever tried to teach them, how everything written about him in the scriptures, in the law of Moses and in the prophets and the psalms, how it was

all bound to be fulfilled. The sufferings of the Messiah, the rising from the dead, the repentance bringing the forgiveness of sins that was now to be their responsibility to proclaim to all nations. *Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself.*

*Crown him the Lord of love;
Behold his hands and side,
Rich wounds yet visible above,
In beauty glorified.*

Decades later John was to write his little letters, tucked away nowadays towards the end of the New Testament, to reassure the next generation of disciples that they too would come to see Jesus, the Lord of love, with all his wounds and scars. Dear friends, he wrote, we are now God's children; what we shall be has not yet been disclosed, but we know that when Christ appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. *Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself.* To see him as he is. No doubt, no confusion, no mixed messages, no crossed wires. Or, as the Paraphrase puts it,

*Our souls, we know, when he appears,
Shall bear his image bright;
For all his glory, full disclosed,
Shall open to our sight.*

John acknowledges that that time of full disclosure, of high visibility, has not yet come. In the meantime we might well be left for all the world like the first disciples, perturbed and uncertain even as Jesus stood among them in his risen power. Yet the promise is for us as for them, and for every generation in between, that we shall see him as he is. And see ourselves as we are in the light of his death and resurrection. *Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself.* And now may God bless to us this preaching of his most holy word, and to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all praise and glory now and forever. Amen.