

Sunday School lesson: 30 April 2017: Now you see him, now you don't!

(Title with apologies to Philip Yancey – see <http://philipyancey.com/now-you-see-him>)

After Caiaphas had bribed the soldiers, the rumour spread that the disciples had stolen the body

But, then another rumour began to surface: that Jesus was no longer dead but alive.

Now, If you were writing a story about a superhero who wanted everyone to know that he/she couldn't ever be killed, I think you would explain that the superhero suddenly appeared at the most important building in the town and shouted out to everyone that they were still alive. But that's not how Jesus did it.

His first appearance was to a woman in a private garden among the grave caves! (John 20:11-16)

Mary Magdalene had stayed in the garden to weep after John and Peter left. After a while she became aware that there was someone else there. By this time, it was probably about the start of the working day, and she just assumed it was a gardener reporting for work. When he asked her why she was weeping and who she was looking for, she begged the gardener to tell her where the body was now. She probably thought he had helped to move it.

When the gardener said her name, she was stunned – and then she realised that only one person said her name in that way and with that voice: Jesus! She was so excited that she flung herself on him and hugged him. Jesus was alive! I imagine her absolutely overwhelmed with excitement – laughing and dancing and wanting to sing!

But now there was work to be done – the disciples needed to be told. Jesus sent her off to them. Can you imagine how different she looked from last time she went looking for them! I think she probably ran as fast as she could, beaming from ear to ear. Anyone who saw her would have guessed she knew good news, even if her red eyes showed she had been crying!

I don't suppose she made much more sense than when she first saw the disciples after Jesus had been crucified. Then all she could say was "Gone!" Now I suspect all she could say was "I've seen him! He's alive!" They probably thought she was mad and just didn't believe her. No-one else saw Jesus in the garden then. No-one else saw Jesus anywhere. Gradually I suspect they came to the conclusion that this was her imagination!

However, later that afternoon, two of Jesus' followers left Jerusalem with all its sadness and began to make their way home to Emmaus (about 10kms away). As they walked a third man joined them and asked them what was wrong and why they talking so seriously. They couldn't believe that this stranger didn't guess they were talking about Jesus' death – after all that's all everybody was talking about that day in Jerusalem! It was the news story of the moment. Eventually the two men explained that they had been following a man called Jesus. They explained that they had believed that he was the Messiah but that was nonsense because he had been killed.

"You're the ones talking nonsense!" the third man said. "Don't you know what the Scriptures say? Just because your Jesus friend suffered doesn't mean he couldn't be the Messiah." And then he began to explain all sorts of verses in the OT which hinted at this. The two men listened fascinated.

They were so fascinated that, when they got home, they invited him to sleep over there with them in their quiet little village. Eventually he agreed and they started supper.

As the man took the bread and broke it, something about how he did it or how he prayed, woke them up and they realised that this man was Jesus! As soon as they realised this, he disappeared into thin air. I imagine they jumped up to look out the door, but he was gone. Immediately the men grabbed some bread and ran back the 10 kms to Jerusalem, leaving their family thinking they were mad!

They ran up to the room where the disciples were, bursting with news but out of breath! As they struggled to get their breath back, the disciples were all shouting out to them – something about Peter and Jesus. Eventually they got the message “Jesus is alive and has appeared to Peter!”

“We know he is alive,” these men from Emmaus said. “He walked along the road with us.” – and so they told their story.

While they were talking, Jesus made another appearance: Jesus just came straight in – through the locked door. Imagine how they jumped! They were terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost! I suspect each of them thought he was mad, and probably glanced to see if the others were also seeing things!

Jesus showed them his nail-torn hands and feet – and they certainly knew it was him, but were a bit afraid to get too near him or touch him. Jesus showed them that he had a real body, but they weren’t convinced – after all he had just appeared there, through the locked door! Finally, he asked for something to eat to show them he was real. And he ate a piece of fish. By now I think they were punching each other with delight. Jesus was alive!

So there was no big superhero action; just Jesus visiting his friends! Jesus’ job now was not to preach or heal or influence people. That part of his job was finished on the cross. He was there to show his friends that he was really alive, that he really was GOD who couldn’t die! No rumours now – just proof.

Now it was their job to tell others! He would be with them, even when they couldn’t see him. Perhaps that’s why he didn’t stay with them all the time. We too can know that Jesus is with us, even though we can’t see him and we too have the job of telling others the good news.

PUZZLE:

Read Luke 24:18 and you will discover that we are told the name of one of the men from the village of Emmaus. What is his name?