

Anglican-Lutheran Conference Durham August 2018

Bible Study led by the Ven Christine Allsopp

Christ is Alive! Where *did* they find him? Galilee or Jerusalem?

“Christ is alive! Really? Where?” is the title of our Conference. After the resurrection the gospels record that Jesus appeared to them a number of times. In this short bible study I want to consider two resurrection appearances of Jesus, one from Matthew (**Matthew 28.1-10 and 16-20**); the other from Luke (**Luke 24.36-53**). They are particularly interesting in the light of that question: “Christ is alive! Where?” In Matthew first an angel, and then Jesus himself, instruct Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to go to his brothers and tell them to go to *Galilee* where they will see him. Whereas in Luke, Jesus appears to the disciples in *Jerusalem* and tells them to stay there.

Let's begin with **Matthew's** Gospel. It is generally acknowledged that the writer is familiar with Mark's Gospel and has access, as has Luke, to a collection of Jesus' sayings. He shows Jesus as a teacher, the new Moses giving his teaching on the mountain. Matthew is a Jew telling a Jewish story to his community, showing how Jesus has fulfilled the law and the prophets. Yet while his gospel has always been regarded as the most “Jewish”, of the four, it ends with Great Commission to the disciples in chapter 28: “Go therefore and make disciples of *all* nations”. For Matthew seeks to answer what for him is a crucial question, described by the Biblical scholar Richard Burridge as “How does a good Jewish boy like Jesus of Nazareth set out to be a Teacher of Israel and yet ends up founding a Gentile Church?”

How does the end of his gospel compare with Mark's? It appears that Matthew has “tidied up” Mark's account, “filled in the gaps”. Mark has a rather opaque ending, with no actual appearance of the Risen Lord and the women fleeing from the empty tomb and saying nothing because they are afraid. Matthew provides two appearance stories. First, Jesus meets the women, who go and tell the disciples what they have seen (28.8-10) and second, Jesus appears to the disciples themselves (28.16-20). Mark has a young man appear to the women, Matthew has an angel descending from heaven rolling back the stone from the tomb.

Whereas Mark's account is open-ended, shrouded in mystery, Matthew's appears to be more transparent and “factual”. Matthew has a tendency to overcome doubt with evidences and authoritative teaching in order to provide a basis for greater certainty. Even when he mentions that “some doubted” (28.17) this is immediately resolved by the appearance of Jesus on the mountain, designed to dispel all doubt. Jesus makes an authoritative declaration and gives his commission to the disciples, The mountain, of course, is the traditional place of encounter with the divine. Matthew makes more references to mountains than Mark or Luke – most notably, of course, the teaching of Jesus known as the Sermon on the Mount, the transfiguration of Jesus, as well as the mountain being a place of healing and of feeding the 4,000.

This mountain in Galilee reminds us therefore of all the other mountains of this gospel, and in the Hebrew Scriptures. At the start of Jesus' ministry Matthew describes Galilee as “Galilee of the Gentiles” (4.15) quoting the prophet Isaiah. So where the ministry of Jesus begins, so it ends, as the new community, the true Israel goes to Galilee where they have been directed to meet their Teacher on the mountain. Yet this is less of an end than a new beginning when Jesus passes the proclamation of the kingdom to the disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” As Jesus has taught them, they are now to become teachers themselves, teaching others what the Teacher has commanded them.

Israel's rejection of their Messiah has led to the acceptance of the Gentiles. The disciples are commanded to go to all nations. Yet Matthew may not have seen Israel's rejection as final. For surely "all nations" must include Israel?

Unlike Luke's Gospel, Matthew does not tell us how the disciples reacted to this appearance of Jesus. Instead, we are left with the promise that Jesus gave to them: "I am with you always, to the end of the age." Near the beginning of the Gospel an angel appeared to Joseph telling him of the child that Mary will bear, describing him as Emmanuel, "God with us" (1.23). Now, at the end, Jesus himself assures the disciples of his continuing presence.

Who was **Luke**? The early church identified him with the beloved physician referred to by Paul in Colossians (4.14), a Gentile writing for Gentiles. Yet he is steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures, even more so than Matthew. Could he have been a God-fearer? Whoever he was, he was clearly an educated man writing for a wider audience than an existing Christian community. He wants to set the record straight in his "orderly account". And he was the only one of the four evangelists to write a sequel to his gospel. Luke-Acts taken together sets out the story of Jesus as a prelude to the story of the origin and growth of the early church. So his account ends, not with the appearances of the Risen Jesus, but in Rome. God's plan of salvation triumphs with the good news reaching the very heart of the Roman Empire

Luke has three accounts following Jesus' resurrection. In the first, Mary Magdalene and other women find the tomb is empty and are told by two "men in dazzling clothes" that "he is not here, he has risen". But when they tell the eleven disciples they consider it to be "an idle tale" until Peter runs to the tomb to see for himself. Then there is the account of Jesus' appearance on the road to Emmaus, when he unfolds the scriptures to two disciples and was made known to them in the breaking of bread. The final account is the one we heard read earlier. It, too, describes Jesus and food. Not bread, but fish, which the disciples give to Jesus to eat, demonstrating that he is not a ghost, but flesh and bones.

A recurrent theme in Luke is that of joy. It dominates the birth stories at the beginning of his gospel and characterizes the ending of his gospel as well. When Jesus appears to them they exhibit a whole range of emotions: startled, terrified, frightened, doubting, disbelieving, wondering. Yet still, Luke tells us, showing joy at the same time. And their joy comes even before Jesus eats the fish to show that he is not a ghost. Then, after Jesus has been carried up into heaven, in the penultimate verse of the gospel, the disciples returned to Jerusalem "with great joy".

Luke also wants to show that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus were foretold in Scripture. The first pronouncement made by Jesus in Luke's Gospel (4.21), after he has read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth, is that "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing". In his final meeting with his disciples (24.44-47) he reminds them that everything written about him in scripture must be fulfilled; not only his suffering, death and resurrection but also, he now adds that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem".

The theme of journey is important to Luke, it has been described as its most distinctive literary feature. His Gospel account begins with Zechariah in Jerusalem. From chapter 9 (v51) where Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem until chapter 19 when he makes his triumphal journey into Jerusalem, Jesus is on a journey with a known destination. Journeys are where God makes himself known: on the Emmaus Road, of course, but also in the Acts of the Apostles. The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch takes place on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8.26-39), and the Risen Lord is revealed to Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9.1-9). It is in the Acts of the Apostles that the Christian faith is described as "the Way". It seems that Luke wants to encourage a sense of the life of faith as a journey with the Lord Jesus

There is a further theme present at the beginning and the end of Luke's Gospel, and that is the centrality of the Jerusalem temple to the social world of Jesus. Zechariah is serving in the temple when he is visited by an angel (1.5-24); Jesus is presented in the temple by Mary and Joseph (2.22-38); aged twelve, he is lost for

three days and found in the temple by his parents (2.41-52). Before his death he teaches daily in the temple. After his ascension his disciples were continually in the temple blessing God.

I hope it is obvious from what I have said so far that I am not interested in the geographical question of where the Risen Jesus was to be found – Galilee or Jerusalem, but in why Matthew and Luke have constructed their accounts as they have.

Matthew structures his gospel to express its main theme that while the Jews have refused to repent those who have followed Jesus are the beginning of the new Israel, which will grow, especially from among the Gentiles. It is natural, therefore, for the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee, earlier described as “Galilee of the Gentiles”, and for the disciples to be commanded to make disciples of *all* nations.

Luke orders his Gospel account as a journey which begins and ends in Jerusalem. His disciples are to remain in Jerusalem for the coming and empowerment of the Holy Spirit as it is from Jerusalem that his message will begin to be proclaimed to all nations, as the journey continues, finally reaching Rome at the end of the Acts of Apostles. Yet for Luke the heart of the real world is neither Jerusalem, the centre of the Jewish world, nor Rome the centre of the Roman world, but in heaven.

What does this mean for us? Common to both gospels is the call to follow Jesus, to listen to and obey his voice and to share the good news with others. Whether we are called to remain in the same geographical place or called to go elsewhere, Jesus by his Holy Spirit promises that he will be with us. In our own spiritual journeying we may find Him in what at first may seem the most unlikely places. May we be encouraged and challenged in these few days together as our speakers explore with us the question “Christ is Alive! Where do we find him?”

“Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
he comes to claim the here and now,
and conquer every place and time.”

Brian Wren