

Today we hear from the gospel of Luke of the appearance of Jesus in the upper room – it's the evening of the day of the resurrection and, like John, in last week's sermon, Luke describes how Jesus appears to the disciples and says to them, "Peace be with you."

In the last few days death has been at the very fore front of our minds following the death of the Duke of Edinburgh. We have just come out of a period of national mourning. The format of the Royal Family has changed, the longest serving British consort in our history has died and the Queen will continue to reign without the man she loved by her side.

She has described the death of the Prince as leaving a huge void in her life.

The disciples who have been beside Jesus in his ministry for 3 years and witnessed his crucifixion 2 days earlier are experiencing the void that comes with the loss of someone very dear.

Imagine how they felt when in the upper room then on the evening of the resurrection when suddenly and without warning, they are faced with the embodiment of Jesus, who they know to be dead.

It's not that surprising that one of the first thoughts to spring to mind was that Jesus was a ghost. But Jesus was at pains to point out that his appearance was not a ghostly one.

Last week Jonathan talked about belief. What do we believe and why? A few people had seen Jesus after he rose from the dead, but Thomas struggled to believe that was possible, not unreasonable, you would think, in the circumstances.

I believed in the Duke of Edinburgh because a few years ago I had seen him just a few yards away from me. I believed it was him because I could see him, and he looked as I thought he would look. I believed in him because I had partaken in the award that bears his

name and now I was standing in his garden at Buckingham Palace, and I believed it was him.

But he was alive, and I could have touched him but I probably would have been arrested!! ...but here Jesus is returning to the disciples after his death...

Because he had appeared to come through the wall, he must have appeared to the disciples like a ghost. He invites them to touch him. You can't touch a ghost; your hand would go straight through since a ghost has no substance.

There is the story of a lady who was being shown around a very old and gloomy stately home. And in one particularly gloomy part of the house she turned to the tour guide and said, "Tell me, are there any ghosts here?"

The guide assured her, "Madam, in all the years I've worked here I've never seen a single ghost!"

"And how long have you worked here," she asked him.

"Four hundred years," he replied.

Jesus was standing there among the disciples. He was flesh and blood, and he did have substance. Perhaps that was why Thomas, as we heard last week, said, using the double negative "Unless I touch him for myself, I shan't believe."

The disciples, understandably, were still terrified. So, Jesus, ever practical, gave them something homely to do. He sent them off to cook a piece of fish both to settle them down and to prove that he was real, for ghosts have no need of food.

And when they'd all eaten together, the disciples were feeling a little more sure of themselves and of Jesus.

Nothing changes, does it? When we have had a shock or gone through something awful, we often reach for a drink of something to eat....a very British thing to do is to have a cup of tea.

After they had eaten, Jesus immediately began to teach them. He opened the Scriptures to them in a new sort of way, just as he had opened the Scriptures to two disciples on the way to Emmaus – an incident Luke describes just before today’s reading.....and a favourite of mine because it was the passage of scripture given to David and I on our wedding day.

It all sounds very normal and just the sort of thing that Jesus did during his previous ministry, but there are a number of hints that it was actually far from normal. He may not have been a ghost, but somehow or other he appeared in the room. He doesn’t seem to have used the door – one minute he wasn’t there, and the next minute he was, standing amongst them.

And Jesus was fit and well. On the Friday his injuries had been so horrific that he’d died from them. Now on the Sunday, only two days later, although he seems to have had scars from the wounds – why else would he have said to them “see my hands and my feet” – clearly there was no bleeding, no discomfort and no pain. Jesus was upright and walking normally and naturally and was as fit and healthy as anyone in the room. Indeed, he’d just walked seven miles to Emmaus and presumably back again – not a journey to be undertaken by the unfit.

And there seems to have been something different about the way in which he taught the disciples. We’re told again and again in the gospels that their minds were dull or that they were blind or that they couldn’t understand.

That wasn’t so for the disciples in today’s account, neither was it so for the disciples on the road to Emmaus. In both episodes, the disciples immediately grasped what he was telling them, and they

were filled with fervour and excitement and enthusiasm. It was as though now they understood with the heart rather than simply with the mind or the intellect. Now he is risen, Jesus teaches them in a new way and their minds and hearts are opened to the Scriptures.

So, the Jesus who appeared in the upper room on Easter Sunday evening and said Peace be with you, was quite different from the Jesus who died on Good Friday afternoon. It was certainly Jesus who died, Jesus the son of Mary and Joseph, and who somehow or other passed through death and was seen alive on the other side of death. But this post-death, post-Easter Jesus was different.

He was Jesus the Christ, the Saviour, the Messiah. He was risen!

When he appears to the disciples the first words he says to them is "Peace be with you."

In the days following the death of the Duke of Edinburgh, his daughter, the Princess Royal, said of him, although we knew it would happen, one is never quite ready.

The disciples certainly weren't ready for what happened in that upper room and the peace that Jesus spoke them is the same peace that we can know in our lives today.

Especially in these days of sadness when perhaps we feel unsettled by recent events. Also following weeks of lockdown, as we begin to emerge into daily life again, perhaps feeling a little insecure, the same Jesus, alive and reigning will still say to us 'Peace be with you'.