

## Gossip

Luke 24.36-48

I want you to imagine a conversation in the pub. Over a pint, someone says - 'did you hear what happened to Fred and Jim and their crowd last week?. They were having a pizza together, and discussing all that business last week - you know what happened, with Josh dying the way he did - and then they claim that Josh was there in the room with them. They didn't eat much pizza after that. Well - I mean - you hear people talking about seeing a ghost, but I've never met anyone who did - have you? Well, they are convinced it was true. But the funniest bit of it was, Josh's ghost, or whatever it was, asked for a piece of the pizza, and ate it in front of them.'

Well, more or less, that is what we hear in today's Gospel. Josh is another form of the name Jesus, and none of the disciples were called Fred or Jim - but they had equally ordinary names. And they did think they had seen a ghost - they were scared out of their wits. I'm not surprised at that. I think I would have been.

But what I want to come back to is my bloke in the pub - he was gossiping, wasn't he? I don't know how he heard the story. It might have been first-hand, or it might have gone through a whole series of people. Maybe you know that poem:

Absolute knowledge have I none.  
But my aunt's washerwoman's sister's son  
Heard a policeman on his beat  
Say to a labourer in the street  
That he had a letter just last week -  
A letter that he did not seek -  
From a Chinese merchant in Timbaktu  
Who said that his brother in Cuba knew  
Of an Indian chief in a Texan town  
Who got the dope from a circus clown,  
That a man in Klondike had it straight  
From a guy in a South American State  
That a wild man over in Borneo  
Was told by a woman who claimed to know.....

Not a very reliable source for the gossip. But we wouldn't be in church if people hadn't spread the word about the most amazing piece of gossip the world has ever had - that a man who was dead is alive again.

Now I wonder how many of you are gossips? I am more or less certain there are many. Have you ever thought what the word *gossip* means literally? Originally it was *godsib*, not *gossip*, and it comes from two Old English words - *God* - which is a word that not surprisingly has not changed

its meaning -and Sib - which has more or less gone, except as part of the word sibling. So to put you out of your misery, originally a godsib was a godparent - someone with whom you have a spiritual relationship because they were sponsors at your baptism.

Now sadly the word has changed its meaning over the years - first of all to meaning a crony, a close friend, and then to the one it generally has today - someone who passes on tittle-tattle about someone else - like that famous cartoon caption which read 'Of course I wouldn't say anything about her unless it was good - and Boy, is this good!' I hope none of you are gossips in the modern sense of the word. People who gossip in that modern sense are appalling, and if they claim to be Christian, need to have a long think about the way they behave. Gossip is 99% of the time untrue, unkind and unnecessary. But it is horribly common.

Let's go back to the original meaning, and try and redeem the idea of being a gossip and make it something good again. In a baptism service, godparents and parents take on doing their best to share the gospel of Jesus with the person who is being baptised. Now if we are honest, we know that an awful lot of godparents never even try to do that - certainly mine didn't. But there is no point in any of us tut-tutting about that - sad though it may be. Because in a baptism service *all* of us take on a role of being people who enable anyone being baptised to make progress along the pilgrimage of faith that the service talks about. And it is a healthy corrective to being critical about what other people do and don't do, if we have to look to ourselves and ask how much *we* have done. I have had people moaning from time to time about people who have brought their children to baptism, and then we don't see them in church again. Maybe they should note that in the baptism service we say that 'we' - all of us - bring the child to baptism. We - all of us - promise to pray for them, set them an example and walk with them. So all of us have a job we can do very well, moderately well, or not very well. We are probably not in a position to point the finger at others too often.

Maybe we get somewhere if we fuse the old meaning of a Godsib, and the modern one of the Gossip. Maybe we get somewhere if we learn to do what someone once described as 'gossiping the gospel'. You see for anyone, it isn't going to be in any formal setting that they really get hold of the truth into which they have entered at Baptism. If they go to a Sunday School when they are old enough - they will get maybe 10 hours or so a year of actual teaching - and even if you think of the whole of the time in church, a maximum of fifty-two hours. Not a lot out of the 8760 hours in the year. We are all more likely to learn the real truth about the Christian message from the small-talk at home, the conversations at bedtime, from watching whether parents, godparents. Grandparents and others actually mean what they say when they tell us they believe. Children learn to do almost everything by copying. If they see their family and their neighbours taking God seriously - there is much more chance they will too.

And what I say applies just as much to adults as to children. Our friends and family, neighbours and colleagues at work are only likely to think seriously about Christian faith if they see it makes a difference to us, if we live it out in the way we are as people all the time. In the Gospel today, Jesus tells those eleven frightened men that they are witnesses - to the fact that he is alive - and not a ghost, because ghosts don't eat bits of fish. And if they hadn't told others, then we would not be sharing the joy of Eastertime as we are at present.

I remember a children's hymn which had a chorus - 'Come to me, learn to love, pass it on, pass it on.' I wonder if you remember that computer virus years ago that crippled parliament and all sorts of other major institutions. It read 'I love you' and if people opened that e-mail message, it automatically passed itself on to everyone else in their address book, and did various bits of damage as well. It was highly infectious. But the truth is that Christ's love is highly infectious - but we need to be the means of passing it on. People don't know that God says 'I love you' unless someone tells them.

That is what we are all called to do - to be gossips of that simple fact. Don't ever be a gossip in the usual sense of the word- that would destroy any hope of showing people you take God's love seriously - but do be gossips in the original sense, as Jesus asked his friends to be - to be people who are witnesses, who say not I know someone who knows someone who told me that someone told them ...- but people who say from their heart 'I know'. However little we feel we have to share- if that bit is real - it will infect others, and that is the way all of us can continue to learn from God, and from each other. Pass it on, pass it on!