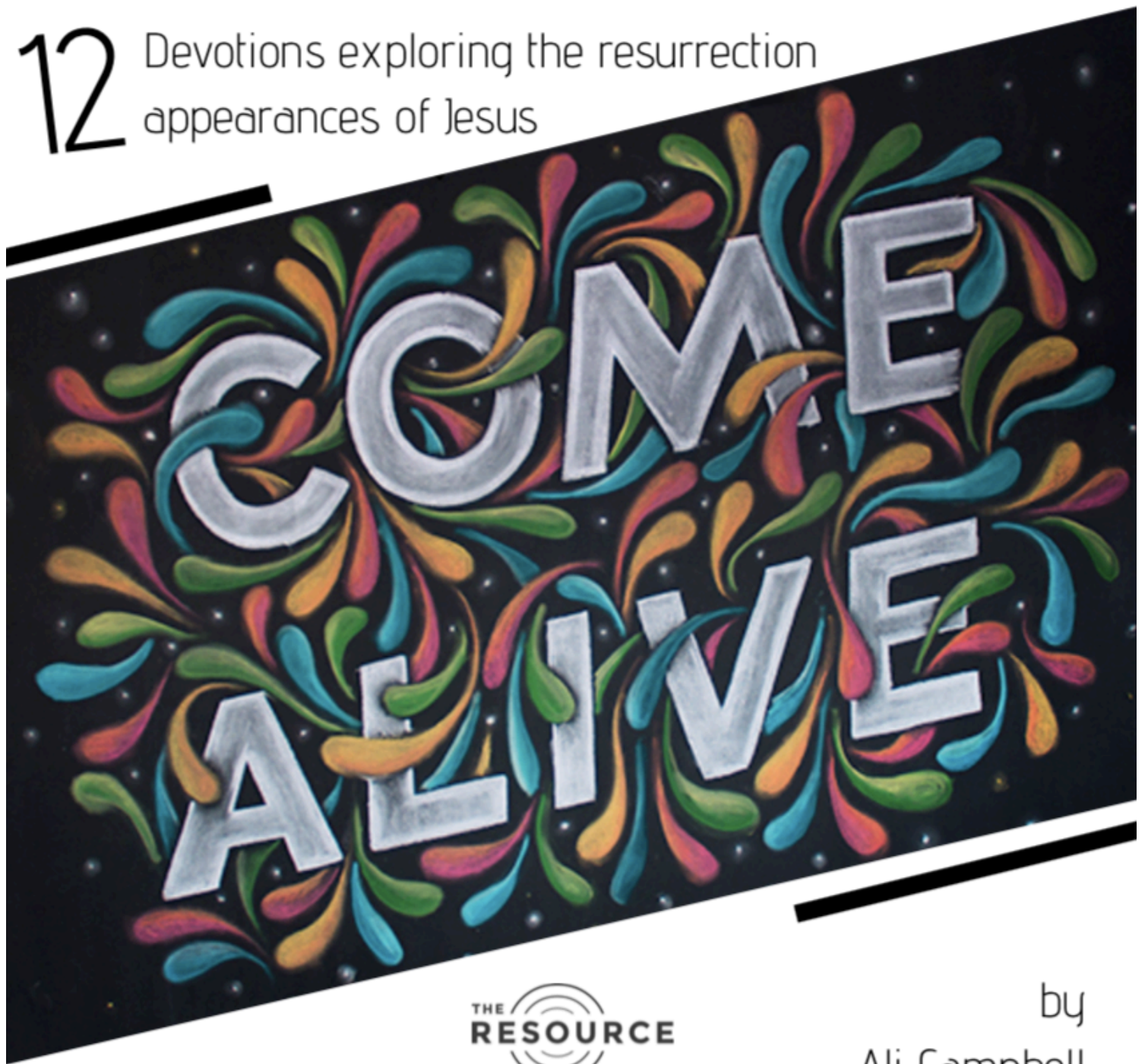


12 Devotions exploring the resurrection
appearances of Jesus



THE
RESOURCE

by
Ali Campbell

**Come alive, come alive
Go and ride your light
Let it burn so bright
Reaching up
To the sky
And it's open wide
You're electrified**

Come Alive, The Greatest Showman

It is mind blowing to consider what God did for us through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Paul says this in his letter to the Ephesians, "As for you - you were dead" (Ephesians 2:1). Dead in our sin, dead to a life with God. Dead and far from home with no way back that we can muster with good thoughts, noble efforts or the best we can bring - we just can't do it. Death had us fully in its grip.

There was no getting out of that. Except - there was.

Jesus died for us, in our place - doing away with our sin and all that separates us from God once and for all. More than that, Jesus came back to life - conquering death. Opening the way for us to move from death to life.

To bring us to our true selves.

To bring us alive in the Spirit.

To bring us home to a place of goodness, peace and joy.

To bring us abundant life!

So, what does this mean for us?

In these 12 short devotions we look at the resurrection appearances of Jesus. There will be a bit of scripture, and a devotional thought - I'll leave the prayer to you :-). These devotions are offered FREE. If you want to support me to enable more content like this, then ask me how at ali@theresource.org.uk

[Thanks to www.briannaailie.com for the cover art]

1

“Woman, why are you weeping?” Jesus asked. “Whom are you seeking?”

Thinking He was the gardener, she said,

“Sir, if you have carried Him off, tell me where you have put Him, and I will get Him.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

John 20:15-16

Here we have the first words of Jesus after the resurrection. He doesn't make a declaration about his cosmic destiny before the birth of time, or split the rocks nearby by shouting, “I'm alive!”. Nope.

Jesus asks a couple of questions. At first glance this seems a bit harsh or even odd - er, Jesus, you know why she is weeping - Mary thinks you are dead and someone has stolen your body! But, what Jesus does here is amazing, he sees Mary. He knows Mary. He gives her space to express her grief, he meets her right where she is at.

Jesus doesn't zap Mary with his newly risen reality - he spends a moment in her grief stricken space.

Two questions, and one simple word changed everything for Mary - they can for us too. As we ask “What does the risen life mean for me?”

“Why?” : Why are things like this? Why do I feel so bad? Why are things difficult?

“Who?” : Who am I? Who do I need? Who is there who can save me?

“Mary” : For Mary, insert your name!

There is a way that people who truly know us can say our name. It is then that Mary realises who stands before her, she simply exclaims “teacher!”

His loving presence today is waiting to receive your questions; your doubts; your joy and disbelief. His loving presence today speak your name that you might rest in the truth that you are known and loved. How will you respond?

2

“Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!”

They came to Him, grasped His feet, and worshiped Him.

“Do not be afraid,” said Jesus. “Go, tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me.”

Matthew 28:9-10

Greetings? Er, the word in Greek doesn't quite mean that. I've checked a few translations - and most say, “greetings”, one even says, “Good morning.” like, you are just out for a stroll and offer a polite acknowledgement to someone else walking along. It doesn't quite fit . . . !

However, the word used here is the same word Jesus uses in the sermon on the mount, where it is translated, “Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad!” That feels more like it . . .

They come to him, grasp his feet and worship. I'd imagine, like Mary before them that they do not want to let go. What on EARTH is going through their minds? Maybe they grab him to reassure themselves that this is actually Jesus - they aren't imaging it - here he is, he is back, he is alive!

Jesus responds with some classic words. “Do not be afraid.” . . . echoing the choir of angels at Jesus' birth, who reassure the startled shepherds amid the news of great joy!

This glorious moment of reunion can't last though - Jesus instructs the women to “go and tell.” Mary and these women are the first of Jesus' followers to not just witness the resurrection - but tell others about it.

When we have found Jesus (or, more accurately, been found by Him) we might want to grasp hold and not let go. We might long to stay in his presence - the one they thought was lost to them forever is found and he is now alive - Jesus himself becomes a picture of what he has been achieved for us!

Yet to fully enter in to the truth of the life we now have, we too must go and tell, with rejoicing, with a joy over flowing, with a peace only Jesus can give. We don't leave him there though standing by the tomb. Instead, we find he comes with us, by his Holy Spirit as the one who now reigns in our hearts. We need never be alone again.

3

And as they talked and deliberated, Jesus himself came up and walked alongside them. But their eyes were kept from recognising him.

He asked them, “What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?”

They stood still, with sadness on their faces.

One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened in recent days?”

“What things?” he asked.

Luke 24:13-30

I’ve only put the first few verses of this incredible story above, so grab your Bible and read the whole thing . . .

As with Mary in his first appearance, it seems as if Jesus just knows what his friends need. Again we have a couple of questions to get the ball rolling. Jesus is saying, “catch me up, what have I missed!” He doesn’t interrupt them, but rather joins them - he doesn’t take them in a different direction, he walks alongside.

Jesus always begins where we are. He does that here with these two; gently and so generously!

After their explanations of what has taken place Jesus opens up all that scripture says about him from Moses to the prophets! I mean, wow - imagine that. It was maybe about 7 miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, so walking together might have taken 3 hours. A 3 hour Bible study with Jesus!

Jesus then looks like he might be walking further, but - so taken with what he has shared with them - they plead with him to stay. They have table fellowship, a meal - Jesus gives a blessing, passes them the bread and BOOM their eyes are opened - they see that it IS Jesus!

Jesus vanishes from sight. The weariness from their 3 hour walk forgotten, these two get up and head straight back to Jerusalem to share the news!

Sometimes, it is in the common everyday rituals of life where we see Jesus, where we know his presence and power. A walk along the road, a conversation, a meal with friends. Are our eyes open? Do we see who is in our midst? He is right here.



There they found the Eleven and those with them, gathered together and saying, “The Lord has indeed risen, and He has appeared to Simon!” Then the two told what had happened on the road, and how they had recognised Jesus in the breaking of the bread

Luke 24:34-35

Of our accounts so far, this is the first one where an appearance of Jesus is reported by others. We have two sets of excited followers desperate to share their news - Jesus is alive! The two, hot foot, back from Emmaus get told “it is true”, as if their testimony isn’t enough. The others haven’t seen Jesus themselves yet, but Simon has . . .

Simon? Peter’s friends refer to him by his birth name and not by the name Jesus gave him, Peter. Might it be that Peter himself did not want to be called by this name anymore? Peter meant “rock or stone” and it had been an amazing moment for Peter when Jesus changed his name. Maybe Peter was thinking, a name doesn’t change who I am or what I have done - it doesn’t change the mess I’ve made of things.

This appearance though, was thought so significant it finds its way in to Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth. “and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve.” (1 Corinthians 15:5)

We are four appearances in, and news is spreading. Good news like this cannot be contained.

Though there is joy in this exchange - not everyone in on the same page. Sometimes, we can find this happens to us. Maybe we are even caught up in something special, because others are excited or full of joy we “go with it” but, unspoken, in the midst of these followers of Jesus are those who are finding it hard to believe.

Maybe there are those here thinking, “just because “Simon says” doesn’t make it so” . . . the character of those who tell us things help to determine in our minds if what they are saying is true. Simon knew this. Could he ever be Peter again?

We don’t know what Jesus said to him in this encounter. If Jesus appeared to you, now - right now - what might he say to you?

5

While they were describing these events, Jesus Himself stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” But they were startled and frightened, thinking they had seen a spirit. “Why are you troubled,” Jesus asked, “and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

And when he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. While they were still in disbelief because of their joy and amazement, he asked them, “do you have anything here to eat?” So they gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in front of them.

Luke 24:36-43

“It is I myself”. Guys, it is really ME.

We need to remember these appearances so far aren’t that spread out - in fact from Emmaus to now have been just a matter of hours. There is a change though - in the first appearance, Jesus tells Mary not to hold on to him - here Jesus is saying, “look - poke me, I’m real!”

The disciples need to know this is not some “spirit of Jesus” but a full on bodily, physical, “life has come back” resurrection. Death has been conquered - this is not just Jesus in another form because his body is done with. He is fully back from the dead.

So, Jesus is at it again with his questions - “why are you troubled?”, “why do doubts rise in your hearts?” Why did Jesus particularly show them his hands and feet? Because the holes from the nails were there - being fully alive again did not mean that God had removed all sign of what Jesus had gone through - the wounds remain.

Clearly, despite his assurances, the crowd is struggling to get their heads round what Jesus is saying and that he is stood in front of them - I mean, wouldn’t you?! So, Jesus asks them for some food. He could be saying “I’m famished guys, I’ve been dead for three days . . . “ or, he is simply saying, “look - I’ll show you, only a real body needs to eat food.”

Everything Jesus does here is to reassure, he begins his appearance by saying “peace be with you” - as he absolutely rocks their world. We don’t worship a ghost, but a real - living, breathing, eating food, physically resurrected, back from the dead Saviour.

6

It was the first day of the week, and that very evening, while the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you!” he said to them.

After he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said to them, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so also I am sending you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said,

“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”

John 20:19-23

This is mind-blowing. I’ve got it down as appearance 6, although there is some debate about whether this is the same appearance as the previous one - but, if you look at what Jesus says, I cannot imagine Luke leaving these statements from Jesus out of his account!

Let's start with the power that upholds Jesus. Before his death, Jesus had walked on water; performed miracles that seemed to defy natural laws (otherwise, they aren't miracles!) and here, in his risen physical form - fully, physically, human - he doesn't need to open a door to be stood in their midst. Rather than Jesus be a ghostly apparition, it may be that he is more real, more substantial now - as if walls and doors are not there, rather than he is not.

His words of peace are familiar - yet maybe carry something extra in this extraordinary setting. Jesus has defeated death, returned from the grave - and he has returned bringing peace. This is not a momentary peace, but a lasting, final peace : the war with sin and death has been won!

“emphusao” is the Greek for “he breathed on them” and it is used just this once in the whole New Testament. Where else might we find such a phrase? Back in the garden, back when humans were brought to life with the breath of God - that time when, briefly, peace had reigned before sin entered the world.

Just as Jesus sent the first disciples - so Jesus says to us, today, “I am sending you”. but we do not go in our own strength, we go with the breath of God, with new life within us, as Paul says - the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 6: 10-11). Wow.

7

Eight days later, His disciples were once again inside with the doors locked, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe”. Thomas replied, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen me, you have believe; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

John 20 : 26-29

Have you seen “End Game” yet? It’s the culmination of a decade of Marvel films - one of the most anticipated films ever and, already, in terms of box office receipts it has sailed passed “Titanic”.

Poor Thomas.

He’s had the disciples going on about seeing Jesus risen from the dead for the last week - after a flurry of appearances and conversations, has it all gone quiet? Did this resurrection everyone else is talking about REALLY happen? It’s been EIGHT days!

Then, here is Jesus again - despite seeing him the week before, the discipleship are still behind locked doors - there is a process going on for them, living the resurrection life to the full without fear is going to take some time.

This is a special visit though, just for Thomas, and Jesus addresses him directly - in direct response to Thomas’ conditions of belief, “unless I see the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” (verse 25).

Jesus says, “ok then.” It is powerful, and challenging and yet full of grace.

Thomas replies, “My Lord and my God!” We are almost at the end of John’s gospel, and throughout his book John has been telling us, through his narrative and re-telling of particular events that Jesus is divine; Jesus is more than a man; He is not just from God . . . he is God.

Here we have a “not sure” disciple declaring this truth - will we declare the same today?

8

John 21

No, I haven't forgotten to put the verses in. The whole chapter is our next appearance of Jesus! So much is happening that it is hard to write something that will fit on a page - we've got a miraculous catch of fish; Peter not being able to contain himself and making a swim for it; breakfast on the beach; a glorious restoration; a reminder that what we have written here is just a glimpse of all that Jesus said and did . . .

As we've seen so often in these appearances, Jesus kicks off with a question, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" It's so casual, it might even be playful - you can just imagine the thoughts on the boat, "Who is this guy pointing out the obvious?!"

How amazing to be addressed like this by the Saviour of the world, "Friends . . ."

"Come and have breakfast" - wow, such a normal thing to do. A massive miracle from the risen, living miracle himself and then - the normal stuff of life. Just think on that for a moment. Do we sometime look for Jesus to provide us with a "huge catch of fish" and then move on (wow, thanks Jesus)? Hanging out with the Lord is about building the kind of friendship, in the everyday, the first disciples had.

That means the routine stuff is as likely to be where we see Jesus at work - and, this kind of closeness creates space for the tough, honest conversations - which is what happens next.

"Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Ouch. we've already suggested that Simon might have ditched the name Peter - but it seems, so has the one who gave it to him. We aren't done though, this question of love is asked three times. Triple ouch - what a way to rub it in.

Actually though, this is Jesus rubbing it out. Each time he asks, it's as if Jesus removes Peter's denials - one by one. Each time he gives Peter a job to do, "feed my lambs". Jesus is saying, no Peter - you aren't done, I've got you - I know you love me, receive my forgiveness.

Whatever you or I have done, whatever mistakes we have made - Jesus has rubbed it out.

9

After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time,
most of whom are still alive, though some have died.

1 Corinthians 15:6

We have leapt from the Gospel accounts to one of Paul's letters. Paul is going through some of the appearances of Jesus . . . his, "after that" refers to his appearance to Peter and the other disciples, which is why I've lobbied this appearance here.

This is it though.

We know nothing else. There is no lengthy, eye witness account - Paul himself was not there, he is retelling what has been told to him. You would think Jesus appearing to 500 - all at once - would have had a greater profile.

It's never about the numbers with Jesus.

We see time and time again in scripture that the (supposedly) private conversations, or the slight asides or the small incidents contain description and detail and others - that we might long to know more about are almost included as an afterthought. Yeah, oh by the way Paul, when you write to the church in Corinth - after our breakfast on the beach Jesus appeared to loads of us all at once . . .

But, by the time Paul is writing, so much has happened - he isn't writing thinking about the immediacy of these appearances, he didn't "see" Jesus until later, and then not in his resurrected form, but as a voice from Heaven. How Paul must have longed to have seen Jesus as the others had!

Here though, we begin to have articulated, the significance of what Jesus has done. This isn't just one man conquering death, this is not just a personal victory - as Paul says just a few verses earlier, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

More important than whether or not Jesus has appeared to you, or you have heard the news from others - Christ died for our sins. Do you believe THIS?

10

Then he appeared to James
1 Corinthians 15:7

That is it.

This feels like even less to go on than the appearance to the 500. We know nothing else about this appearance. It seems odd at first glance to even mention it.

With all that Paul says in the chapter, with his focus on the reason Jesus died, what his life, death and resurrection actually mean for all of us - why mention this appearance at all.

From an appearance to 500 to an appearance to 1. Jesus cares about individuals, this isn't some distant "cosmic Christ" who has risen from the dead and now reveals his true form. This is still the Jesus these disciples know and James was one of his closest friends.

Jesus, if you remember, was transfigured on a mountain top (with Moses and Elijah turning up and a voice from heaven) - see Matthew 17: 1-8; Mark 9: 2-8; Luke 9: 28-36 for more. Only three disciples were there to witness it and James was one of those.

Although we have no other details it seems as if this was a personal appearance to a friend.

I love that.

Knowing nothing else about it suggests there is nothing for us to know. The appearances that have most relevance for our lives and how we respond to Jesus seem to be - on the face of it - those where Jesus speaks or something happens "ahh, he ate something" or, "look, he still has the wounds" or, listen, "peace to you."

This one though, reminds me, when all else is said and done - when the great happenings in scripture are told and re-told - when we (along with Paul, looking back) begin to paint a picture - not just of Jesus the Christ, but Christianity and our faith and what we believe and why . . .

That, at the heart of it - for all of us, from the crowd to the one - is a personal relationship with the Son of God. Yes, Jesus died for us all - that "all" also means Jesus died for YOU.

11

Meanwhile, the eleven disciples went to Galilee,
to the mountain Jesus had designated.
When they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted.
Then Jesus came to them and said,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28: 16-20

These are the last words in Matthew’s gospel. We call this, “the great commission” - it is an encouragement to all followers of Jesus to share the good news and make disciples. This is probably the same appearance as the one that ends Mark’s gospel.

Is it the 11th appearance? It is hard to be clear, up until now I’ve tried to go through the appearances as they might have happened - but, in both Matthew and Mark, apart from the early ones around the tomb and a quick mention of the road to Emmaus encounter we jump to this appearance which has a tone we might associate with Jesus’ “final words.”

Taking it that there have been a host of appearances (more than have been written about according to John) we have an interesting phrase in this passage - “when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.”

Worship and doubt. There is no suggestion that those doubting stood there at a distance watching the others, it seems they all worshipped. The word used here for “doubt” only appears twice in scripture - the earlier one refers to Peter sinking in the water when he takes his eyes off the Lord, and Jesus asks, “why did you doubt?”

The root of the word in Greek is “dis” which means two or double. It means to shift between two opinions. This isn’t unbelief - its more like wrestling between two positions - finding yourself at a cross-roads, hesitating, “is this what I want?”

What Jesus says next calls out to us through the ages, “are you on the fence, or are you with me?” Do what I have commanded, go and tell and know that I go with you. Let’s not waver!

12

So when they came together, they asked Him,
“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus replied,
“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After He had said this, they watched as He was taken up, and a cloud hid Him from their sight. They were looking intently into the sky as He was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.”

Acts 1: 6-11

This is it. The last words we have from Jesus before his ascension - so, whatever you think of my order with the previous 11 appearances, I think I've got this one right :-)

The Kingdom of Israel remains the focus for the disciples, they are yet to grasp that the good news is for all. In their minds, they have not - at this time - given a thought to the gentiles. Jesus pushes them with what he says next - a gentle rebuke, a promise of power, and the scope of the task. Some questions as we finish . . .

“A gentle rebuke” - Are you fixed on things that aren't your concern? Things that it isn't for you to know? What has God called you to do? What should be uppermost? I can spend my days thinking about and asking questions about things I cannot influence - that God hasn't asked me to do, but there I am - sticking my nose in.

“The promise of power” - We know that Pentecost is on its way for the disciples and, with it, the birth of the church. I'm writing this and you are reading this because the power of God has given birth to this new life in Christ in me and in you. Christ “in you” is the hope that we have!

“The scope” - We know, from what ever mission agency tells us that sharing the good news is not complete. Many have never heard of Jesus, but our scope doesn't need to be ends of the earth - our scope could be in our own home, our school, our town.

Let's not stand and stare; et's get on with the abundant, Christ filled life we've been called to!