**Jesus appears to his disciples**

It’s not uncommon when someone close to you dies, to dream vividly about that person. When my uncle, a very fit and active farmer, aged 55, died suddenly from pancreatitis many years ago, my mother dreamt that night that the old Holden owned by her parents pulled up outside her house. Her parents were sitting in the front seat and the back door of the car opened so that my uncle could join them in their journey. My uncle’s much loved little dog was also in the car. This dream gave some comfort to my grieving mother.

As another example of this, Thich Nhat Hanh (Vietnamese Buddhist, Nobel peace prize nominee) wrote the following:

“I suffered for more than one year after the passing away of my mother. But one night, in my hut in the highlands of Vietnam, I dreamed of my mother. I saw myself sitting with her, and we were having a wonderful talk. She looked young and beautiful, her hair flowing down. It was so pleasant to sit there and talk to her as if she had never died. When I woke up it was about two in the morning, and I felt very strongly that I had never lost my mother. It was obvious in that moment that my mother is always alive in me.

I opened the door and went outside. The entire hillside was bathed in moonlight. Walking slowly in the moonlight through the rows of tea plants, I noticed my mother was still with me. She was the moonlight caressing me as she had done so often. Each time my feet touched the earth I knew my mother was there with me. I knew this body was not mine but a living continuation of my mother and my father and my grandparents and great-grandparents. Of all my ancestors. Those feet that I saw as "my" feet were in a sense “our” feet. Together my mother and I were leaving footprints in the damp earth. From that moment on, the idea that I had lost my mother no longer existed. All I had to do was look at the palm of my hand, feel the breeze on my face or the earth under my feet to remember that my mother is always with me, available at any time.”

Again, some comfort when dealing with death of someone close to you.

The disciples were having to deal with the sudden death of their much loved master and teacher. Both Pharisees and Essenes believed in immortality of the soul. Quoting Josephus regarding Essene beliefs (War, book 2, Chapter 8 verse 11) For their doctrine is this, that bodies are corruptible, and the matter they are made of not permanent, but the souls are immortal and continue forever. When they are set free from the bonds of the flesh they rejoice and mount upward. This is consistent with the Christian viewpoint too, and once again, offers comfort.

There are several well-known post resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples. We read last week of Mary Magdalene at the tomb, addressing the gardener, only to suddenly become aware that is Jesus she is addressing. We read of followers of Jesus walking for quite a distance with a stranger on the road to Emmaus, only for them to finally recognise the risen Jesus. We read of the disciples fishing on a beach back in Galilee, a stranger giving advice on the fishing, a great haul, then a shared meal and recognition that is stranger is actually Jesus. Some time later the risen Jesus addresses Saul/Paul after his fall on the way to Damascus and this has a profound influence on his life.

Today’s reading from John suggests there is more to the resurrection than resurrection of the soul. There is a physical side. The disciples are able to view Jesus’ wounds in his hands and side. This contrasts with Jesus saying to Mary Magdalene earlier that same day: **17**“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ The following week a sceptical Thomas is even invited to touch those wounds.

We can agonise over the practicalities of a physical resurrection, but it is probably more important to consider the message the resurrected Jesus is bringing to us. The details of the resurrection itself will probably always remain mysterious and miraculous. We only know that something happened to convince his followers that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited messiah. We also know that against all expectations Jesus has profoundly influenced the history of the world and we are still talking about him today, nearly two thousand years after his death. What does the resurrection mean to us now in current times? We celebrate the very presence of the risen Jesus in our church and in our lives,. We celebrate that sin and death have no power over us and that we are free to live, love and seek justice.

Jesus, appearing to his disciples behind a locked door, greeted them with the standard greeting Shalom or peace be with you. Peace, an absence of war or conflict, is vital to wellbeing. War is the ultimate failure. But shalom implies much more than this. It refers also to wholeness, completeness, wellbeing, in body and mind. It is a blessing as well as a greeting.

Next Jesus told his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” **22**And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit”.  The disciples were charged with continuing the mission of Jesus here on earth and were inspired with the Holy Spirit to do just that. Jesus was to live through them.

Thirdly Jesus says to his disciples **23**If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” We all fall short, fail to live up to expectations, and forgiveness is a vital need if a relationship is to be restored.

There are many basic needs: clean air, food, water, clothing, shelter, safety, access to health and education, a sense of belonging, respect and love, but peace and forgiveness were the two vital needs singled out by Jesus at the end of the gospel of John. Quoting Pope Francis, “A little bit of mercy makes the world less cold and more just.”

Dominating the news for the past week have been various wars, Anzac Day, the Federal election and of course the death of Pope Francis, who died on Easter Monday and his funeral held last night, our time. The election of a new pope will be held in a few days’ time. Pope Francis was sometimes controversial, but at the same time was a caring, peaceful and inclusive pope, who was much loved by the Catholic Church. He took the name Francis in honour of St Francis of Assisi, author of the hymn ‘Make me a channel of your peace’.

Pope Francis had a particular rapport with the poor and marginalised in society, indigenous people, refugees, those living in poverty and victims of war. He saw the church as a ‘Field Hospital, which ought to be more concerned with those who suffer than defending the interests of the institutional church, and so more faithful to the gospel. He welcomed LGBTQ people, famously saying “Who am I to judge.” Under Pope Francis the Catholic church became a more compassionate church.

Pope Francis was concerned with issues of justice. He spoke out on climate change, seeing this as an injustice to future generations. Climate change is beginning to impact us even now. I have just paid my house insurance bill, three times higher than a few years ago, reflecting the number of Australian houses lost in fire and flood. I had a foretaste too of what rising sea levels might do on a recent trip to Kiama when an east coast low pressure system resulted in huge seas. A king tide overnight brought waves across the foreshow footpaths, across the car park, into and beyond the local surf club in spite of sand bagging and right across the town park, almost to the shops on the other side. There was sand and seaweed everywhere. Climate change is a major concern, especially to younger people and those living on low lying islands.

The pope also condemned those nations that stockpile nuclear weapons, saying that to have nuclear weapons is immoral, let alone the use of them. There is no issue more important than the prevention of nuclear war.

Pope Francis was particularly concerned about the ongoing tragic events taking place in Gaza, a genocide broadcast directly to our television screens, and has begged for peace. The cruelty taking place is almost beyond belief. I learnt in recent days that every night since the awful events that took place on Oct 7, 2023, the pope has been in contact by video call with the Christian Palestinians that are sheltering in tents in the courtyard of the Holy Family Church in Gaza along with some of their Muslim neighbours. Each call has lasted about 15 minutes. The last call was just hours before he died. This was obviously a high priority for him.

Quoting from the Easter message of Pope Francis, from just one week ago. “I wish for the light of peace to radiate throughout the Holy Land and the entire world. I think of the people of Gaza, and its Christian community in particular, where the terrible conflict continues to cause death and destruction and to create a dramatic and deplorable humanitarian situation. I appeal to the warring parties: call a ceasefire, release the hostages and come to the aid of a starving people that aspires to a future of peace.” Jesus still lives in the world today. He lives through all those billions of Christians he has inspired and who continue his mission of justice and peace.