**SERMON PREACHED BY
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**SENIOR CANON & RECTOR
OF THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JAGO DE LA VEGA
 THURSDAY, APRIL 25, 2019**

**“You are witnesses of these things” – Text: Luke 24: 48**

(I dare say that the sermon for this morning is exclusive), the word this morning is for the ears of only those who have had an experience with the Risen Christ. It is for those who have seen, heard, experienced. Those who are witnesses.

This Missionary Service is held against the background of the Church’s engagement in the season of Intentional Discipleship, reflected in the Synod theme.

**“Intentional Disciples: Instruments of Grace and Hope.”**

While I cannot speak to the general participation of the whole Diocese in this season of Intentional Discipleship, I know there is a zeal and commitment to the process embraced by laity and clergy, something we do not always experience.

We celebrate this commitment! But let me hasten to say friends, the effectiveness of this thrust is dependent not just on our engagement in Bible study and discussions, but also on our readiness as disciples to disciple others.

We who have gathered in this room on this day, like the band of disciples, the Risen Christ comes to us, opening our eyes to confront who we really are.

“You are witnesses” … simple but profound words from the lips of the Risen Christ.

Witnesses here are not just those who have seen an event as it unfolds but those whose lives have been so changed by the event that such must be told and retold by lives shaped by such events. It was not enough to believe in the resurrection. So it has to be for us. At some point, we have to move from the event of the resurrection to experiencing the resurrection.

Experiencing resurrected life begins with recognising the Risen Christ among us… affecting us so deeply that our entire identity and purpose are wrapped up in the experience.

All the gospel texts for this week take us to the post resurrection scenes..

The Passover celebrations were over….. worship ended.. the sacrifices had been offered and the temple tax paid.

Now everyone departed …. But the Jesus people … the followers of the Way left the celebrations dejected.

The one on whom they had placed their hope is dead, rumours abound: the authorities have removed his body from the borrowed tomb … the disciples must have taken it to be interred elsewhere…. He has been raised from the dead but what could this be? What is the meaning of all this?

They talked about the events!

They whispered in fear!

They groaned from the depth of their hearts!

“Everything has come to naught”

Had the last three years been for nothing?

* What of the brave new world Jesus promised?
* What about the least becoming the greatest?
* What about this new world order where the meek would inherit the earth?
* What about this promise of life in all its fullness?
* Celebration turned to despair, grief and doubt, Where is he?

In the wee hours of the morning, on the first day the Lord’s Day, he opened the eyes of Mary Magdalene….. she ran with the message, “I have seen the Lord.” New hope rekindled and by her and through her the blessed hope was ignited.

Later, two of the Jesus sympathisers who had gone to the Passover celebration were on their way home trying to make sense of what had happened in Jerusalem over these few days, when Jesus shows up out of nowhere interrupting their conversation.

What are you discussing with each other as you walk along? He asked as if to say ....you don’t understand.

They see Him, they hear him, but they did not recognise Him.

It was only as Jesus broke bread with them that their eyes were opened.

Their doubts and disbelief vanished

Their hearts were warm within them

Their feet were set in motion

They had to return to Jerusalem with a sense of urgency to tell, we have seen the lord

As they join with the whole company to testify to the Risen Christ, Jesus shows up again.

**Jesus never fails to show up when is name is called.**

When we are in vulnerable states.

They see Him, they hear his voice, but they do not recognise him.

They thought they were seeing a Ghost. They knew Jesus was crucified, died and was buried.

They knew dead men do not come back to life.

And although witness was now given to his resurrection, they thought it could only be a ghost.

The tomb was open, but their eyes and minds were closed …. Filled with their own grief and pity. They were unable to recognise the holiness that stood among them. They were continuing to live, think and understand only in the human categories.

Jesus must bring them into a new reality. This began with :

Touching and seeing …….

Flesh and bones …..

Hands and feet ……

…and broiled fish.

He opened their eyes and hearts and minds.

Christ our Lord, longs and desires to open all minds to understand. Just as he did with the disciples gathered… and so, he comes to us.

“You are witnesses of all these things”, this has profound implications for us as individuals and as the church gathered.

In St. John’s Gospel, Peter is singled out, and then Jesus spoke to one man, Peter, charging him to feed his sheep… but here, the Risen Christ speaks to all in the room, men and women, commissioning them to a new vocation as witnesses…..

* To bear witness to the truthfulness of the Gospel
* To bear witness to the cross
* To bear witness to the resurrection
* To bear witness to the need of repentance
* To bear witness to the forgiveness of sins

We are not all called to be Pastors, preachers, or to be evangelists, but everyone is called to witness ….always ready to give a response to the reason for our hope… rekindling the hope lost in the despised and marginalised, the abused and forgotten, crossing all boundaries so the love of God in Christ may be experienced through you.

We can’t be the people who have found our “sweet Jesus” and he belongs to us alone… not to them.

We can’t be the people who are saved and are content with the whole world lost.

We are witnesses and must be like the One to whom we witness – feed the poor…..lift and bless the little children… clothe the naked…. Love the unloved…visit the sick…. Seek out the delinquent.

We are not called to be brash or to be indiscrete or discourteous, but to be refreshing and spontaneous and natural as we share the life of our hearts.

Today, He speaks to us here in this Synod

“You are witnesses”

This has great implications for us all

All of us have claimed to have had an experience with the Risen Christ. You have seen and experienced the Risen Christ. Jesus didn’t intend to hire a marketing firm to get the good news out to the world.

Marketing firms can do a fine job, and they can do it, whether or not they believe in this business they promote.

But…. for His gospel, Jesus required far more than a dispassionate sales promotion.

Those who would tell His Gospel would not just be telling a truth told to them, but testifying to the reality they experienced themselves. This is discipling. This is what we have been called to.

Jesus wasn’t looking for a skilled sales team. Instead, we who are witnesses and whose lives have been shaped by our encounter and experience must now do what witnesses do.

His work is on in earnest, and as Christ sent his disciples in the power of the Spirit, so He sends us as witnesses in our homes, church, community.

As they were faithful, so may we be in living out our called lives as witnesses.