

SERMON

John 20:19-31

The Heart of Evangelism is to Meet Christ in his Word
Nunawading and Waverley, 24-4-22

Dear friends in Christ,

The lights in the toilet at the Glen Waverley church were left on so I returned to the building. Rather than trying to find the foyer light switch I walked down the passage and walked into a wall. Fortunately, I wasn't going fast. We have a habit of colliding into solid things when driving a car, losing our balance or meeting someone head-on on playing sport. The Risen and ascended Jesus does not belong to this world of hard objects as the disciples discovered when he stood amongst them in the room **though the doors were locked**. Unseen, he had heard what Thomas was demanding a week before. When we testify to our Lord Jesus, as I am doing now, he is here amongst us. He is with us, unseen, as we go about our daily lives. It is scary to consider that he sees and hears what we are up to and perhaps is disapproving of what is going on in our lives. However, he is with us as we bear witness to him, speaking through our words in order to reach into the lives of others. No distance, no time, no solid object can prevent him from meeting people today. Our theme is this: The Heart of Evangelism is to Meet Christ in his Word

Experiencing the risen Christ is the foundation for personal evangelism. If your heart is full of Christ, he is going to manifest himself in your speech and actions. The first disciples were eye-witnesses. They could say: **We have seen the Lord**. That was their experience. Today, it is through hearing his message that Christ meets us. But what I am saying, before we say that message, it may be more useful to tell others what it has meant for you to know Christ. Christian people often say to me, "I don't know what to say. Someone asked such and such a question and I couldn't say anything". That is because you are thinking of the question. My suggestion is to forget the question and tell them your experience of the Risen Saviour. By all means, answer a genuine question but when faced with an objection, the Holy Spirit will give you the answers as you talk about your experiences of the Lord. For example, someone might say that Christians have started wars. Do not try to figure that one out. I used to think that I had to have an answer for every objection. Rather, begin with your experience of knowing Christ. Say, "I have the peace of Christ because he is alive and has come to me. He has helped me overcome my anger and grudges and my envy,

which only lead to conflict. I believe Jesus can end the wars that begin in human hearts.” Isn’t that a better response than dry old evidence from history?

We think it is reasoning with someone that will bring people to Christ. Perhaps, in some situations that can work. However, facts presented to him from his friends would not settle Thomas’s mind. Seeing Jesus did. The disciples must have reasoned with him and kept repeating what Jesus had said: **Peace be with you**. They would have described how Jesus **showed them his hands and side**. Evidence and facts did not help Thomas. He had to see for himself. So, there is nothing wrong with beginning with your testimony, your meeting with Jesus, before you go on to the full message of Jesus’ life, salvation by grace, the new life, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the coming judgement etc.

When bringing the news of forgiveness and redemption to others, let us remember that Christ is present with us and is acting through his word. We cannot see him but he is risen, alive, ascended with power and is here. The Spirit does the actual speaking through us and directs us as we go about being his witnesses. Thus, we are his authorised preachers and teachers and hold a priestly office, bringing salvation to others because **Christ has breathed on us and we have received the Spirit**. His presence dwells within us. Believing this, we can relax about sharing Christ and stop worrying about what to say. The power is with us.

If people are still willing to talk, a great next step is to invite them to read one of the gospels together. Then you are going from your experience to the full testimony, the eye witnesses’ accounts and the teachings of the Holy Bible. Our aim is to get to the point that Thomas reached where he confessed to Jesus: **my Lord and my God**. We get there by a number of steps: relating our meeting with Jesus. This can include a conversion experience, an answer to prepare, the way the Lord has arranged events so that you saw the hand of God at work, perhaps a vision or message. Politely answer genuine questions, then inviting people to go through the word with you. Or invite them to a short course being run at church. I’ll put one on as soon as we have some people ready to participate.