



Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Easter

Cardiff Cathedral

Sunday 18th April 2021

Archbishop George Stack

My favourite British actor is David Suchet. He is probably best known for his TV appearances as Agatha Christie's Belgian detective Inspector Poirot. I once sat in the second row of the National Theatre, London, and saw him play the parts both of Mozart and his jealous enemy Salieri in Peter Schafer's play "Amadeus".

Suchet is Jewish by birth. The Yiddish origins of his name means "kosher butcher". But in 1986 he was converted to Christianity by reading Chapter 8 of Paul's letter to the Romans in a Gideon Bible which are left in hotel rooms. He was particularly struck by the words "*The whole of creation, as we know, has been groaning in one long act of giving birth*". The ecological debate.

As an actor, David Suchet is used to reading scripts aloud in order to learn them. He tells how he always reads the Bible aloud in order to bring it to life. This Easter he recorded the Gospel of St. John as a spiritual exercise. 74,000 people have viewed them. He has recorded other books of the Bible as well and they are wonderful to hear. Dare I say that I think Suchet is even better at reading the Bible aloud than another great Jewish actor David Kossoff!

People sometimes ask me how I prepare my sermons. One thing I have always done is read the bible extracts for Sundays four or five times aloud. Words, sentences, passages jump out at you and demand you explore them. Otherwise I have found it is too easy to read the words to myself and miss the meaning. The same event happens as well when different people witness the same thing happening but give differing accounts as to what a person said or did. You only have to watch some of the evidence given in the George Floyd murder trial to realise that. As T. S. Eliot once said *“You can have the experience but you can still miss the meaning”*. Sometimes it is only years later that we understand the meaning of some experience in our lives. The world of psychotherapy is an attempt to help people understanding the meaning behind thoughts, words and actions.

Today’s gospel passage of another resurrection appearance of Jesus illustrates perfectly having the experience but not understanding it’s meaning. Rather than rejoice at the presence of Jesus, the disciples were in a state of alarm and fright. They thought they were seeing a ghost. They can’t make sense of what they are seeing. Jesus asks them - and us - why are you so agitated? They have eyes but they do not see. They have ears but they do not hear. The mere appearance of Jesus is not by itself compelling. The multi layers of trauma and pain and disillusion and hurt and

disappointment have to be peeled away so that they can be present to Jesus just as he is present to them. And the words that jumped out to me as I read this passage aloud to myself? *“And he opened their minds to understand the scriptures”*. These were good Jewish boys, undoubtedly. Barmitzvah. Daily prayers. Synagogue on Saturday. All scripture based. They would have heard the words of what we call the Old Testament numerous times. Even though they were waiting and hoping that the promises of the prophet Isaiah would be fulfilled in a Messiah, they did not understand his other prophecies about a Suffering Servant. Jesus understood. *“So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead”*. They had heard but they did not understand.

David Suchet has said he is passionate about reading the scriptures aloud. *“My message to everybody is to read it aloud to yourself. Never, ever, read the words silently. Let it go into your body. Absorb it. And let it come out, so that you continue this wonderful, wonderful relationship you can have with God and his Word”*.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. And he opened their lips also to proclaim the truth they now believed. Perhaps our lips should be opened as well to read

the bible aloud to ourselves and let its meaning sink into our hearts.
