

Epistle: Acts 4 verses 32-35

The group of believers was one in mind and heart. None of them said that any of their belongings were their own, but they all shared with one another everything they had. With great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God poured rich blessings on them all. There was no one in the group who was in need. Those who owned fields or houses would sell them, bring the money received from the sale, and turn it over to the apostles; and the money was distributed according to the needs of the people.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God

John 20: Verses 19-31

It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he said. After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!"

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"

In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon, Graeme, John 20 , v 19-31 Doubting Thomas

What a strange name for today – Low Sunday? I think it is meant to contrast with last Sunday as being the High Festival, and traditionally Easter week would last for the 7 days following Easter Sunday.

Whether we do much about it or not, we mentally and emotionally respond with the 40 days of Lent. But come Easter Day, the feeling is an emotional high. Each year, I look forward to seeing how many people of our community take Lent and especially Holy Week to heart and discover the empowerment of a liturgical journey that points us to the experience of Easter in new ways. You can't just parachute into Easter Day unless you have trodden the path of Lent and the Passion.

During this Easter Season, which runs until Pentecost Sunday, I wonder what kind of conversation God will be looking to have with us as we journey along, perhaps as we go for walks, or attend zoom services, or have conversations with people, or as we pray.

Lets look for a short while at our gospel text today. It had been a long, bewildering, exhausting day for everyone. After the awful events of Good Friday, the disciples begin this day discovering the body of their teacher removed, by whom they do not know. Blinkered by grief, they have forgotten what Jesus had spent three years trying to show them, and so his death on the cross is a huge loss to them, the implications of which are literally mind numbing.

They do what many human beings do in such circumstances – they lock themselves away. Secluded they seek that feeling of safety amidst a hostile world. One of the central themes for John is the need to have faith. Faith is complicated by fear and doubt. John emphasizes doubt.

Our reading gives us an early taste of the Holy Spirit, prior to Pentecost, it also gives us the job of spreading the gospel of salvation around the world, as the

Father sent Jesus, so he is sending us, but I'm going to spend a few minutes looking at Thomas, this is the second time we meet him, the first is in the Lazarus story,

So, What are we to make of doubting Thomas? We need, I think, to see Thomas not as the doubting disciple, but as the personification of all their doubts. I see him as courageous, he alone is prepared to stand up and ask the question that was on all their minds, Can this really be true?

The saying Doubting Thomas has become a name heaped on those who cannot rise to the demands of being true believers. In the story of Thomas, doubt is posed as the opposite of faith. This unfortunately has come to obscure for us the curious relationship of doubt to faith. Thus the majority of Christians in this country are taught from an early age that doubt is the enemy of faith. That to be a true believing Christian is to banish doubt, Thomas defiantly declares that unless he sees the proof he will not believe. I am sure you have heard other sermons talk about faith and doubt, and how it can be compared perhaps to electricity. We know its there, we are told its there, but we cannot see it, and sometimes we need to prove it really is there, with obvious consequences!

So John reports Jesus coming back the same time the following week seemingly to put Thomas right. Yet, despite what Jesus tells Thomas- *do not doubt but believe* and *blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe*, the process in play here is one in which Thomas comes to faith *because* he has the courage to voice his doubt!

John has a purpose in focusing on doubt rather than fear. He reveals his purpose in the last verses of Chapter 20. He writes here that his recording of these events is but a snapshot of many events not recorded. He records these events so that successive generations may believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and so have the life that comes from faith. So his emphasis is on his Gospel as the living proof taken on faith for generations yet to come. He has a reason for the story

about Thomas. It is to denigrate doubt as a desire for immediate here and now proof, in favour of received faith. Yet, to doubt is to be human.

The Anglican Tradition encourages us to give voice to doubt in matters of faith. It recognizes that deep human truth – to be human is to have doubt. For Anglicans doubt is not the enemy of faith. On the contrary, as we see with Thomas, doubting is very often the road to faith. No belief is possible unless we have arrived via the road of doubt. Therefore,. To doubt is not to deny what is true, it is to go in search of what is true in order that you may find it. Doubting is a necessary process that enables us to finally accept truth. It can sometimes be courageous to doubt. Coming to faith is a process. That process leads via the road of doubting. Coming to faith will take as long as it needs to take. What matters is not arriving at faith as if like a destination. What matters is being on the road that leads to faith.

For me, the only effective enemy of faith is fear. It is the disciples fear that has enclosed them not only behind locked doors made of wood and walls of plaster. Jesus moves through the locked doors and walls erected to protect them. He stands among them and says *peace be with you*. He then shows them his wounds. It is interesting that Jesus' post resurrection body still displays the marks of his suffering. Jesus is coming as one wounded.

As we journey in conversation with God through the 50 days of Easter, our first task is to become aware of those places deep within where we have locked away our fear. The message of the Resurrection is that through Jesus, God promises us new life and new life casts our fear. Yet, in our new life we will still bare the scars of the wounds caused by our fear. Scarred and wounded we might remain, but we will no longer be afraid.

Let our doubts deepen our faith, let us continually strive for answers, let us be courageous, for we have all we need in the Bible, and Jesus comes and stands among us today and says 'Peace be with you'.