

Low Sunday

11 April 2021

Reading: John 20 vv 19 – 30

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Now Thomas (called Didymus) one of the Twelve was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the lord!

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

A week later his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said,, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas said to him “My Lord and my God.”

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection:

History has been unfair to Thomas. He is universally known as “Doubting Thomas” and the inference is that somehow his faith (and the faith of fellow doubters) is less strong than that of the other disciples. In fact, as the Easter stories make clear the reaction of all those confronted by the resurrection for the first time

was disbelief. Peter and John went to see for themselves and found only an empty tomb and discarded grave clothes. Mary hung around the tomb wondering who had moved the body and where it had been taken. Two travellers on the road to Emmaus said “Some women said that he is alive.” But they did not find this convincing. Thomas was no different if he refused to be carried away by wishful thinking.

We come to faith in different ways. Some by examining the evidence for the resurrection and finding it so convincing that other ideas must be discarded. Some grow slowly into faith, as part of the church community. For others it is a dramatic or mystic experience that changes the direction of their life. For others still, it is the lives and characters of those who daily walk with Christ that draws them to him.

How we come to faith may be interesting but in the long run is not important. What is important is what we do about it afterwards. As every generation of Christians we need to work out our faith in terms of our own lives and in terms of the world in which we live.

As I have moved around the churches over many years I have been made aware of different ways in which personal faith is expressed. For some their response to the Gospel has involved diet; for many it has conditioned their choice of employment. For many also it determines their political views (which do not always agree with each other).

Our response to the Gospel is important and sometimes we need to question our assumptions by listening to what others have to say. The experience of listening to debates at General Assembly and hearing how different people bring their understanding to bear on contemporary questions is one that I value. When Norman Goodall and John O'Neil could publicly shake hands in friendship after vigorously expressing differing points of view, or when David Hilborn and Roberta Rominger sat up half the night in order to understand each other's view of Scripture, the old hymn “Whosoever will may come” took on a new meaning. A contemporary of mine entered the ministry of the URC after regular service in the army. Part of his theological course was to study pacifism – not because his former career was considered incompatible with Christian Faith, but because his teachers knew that he would have to minister to some who might well hold this view and he needed to understand and respect this personal response to the Gospel.

Thomas needed to be convinced and set out the proof he needed. He was offered that proof and from that point did not look back. There is a tradition that Thomas carried the gospel to India – well beyond the bounds of the Roman empire and today there are those in India who look to Thomas as the founder of their church.

How we come to faith is not important. We share an experience of Resurrection, of New Life and whether we then travel to new lands and strange cultures, or live this

new life in familiar surroundings we must move out of the room with its locked doors into the light of day, to face welcome or hostility, admiration or mockery as we witness to what we have received.

This past year has been for all of us a time of doubt and questioning. Now we can look forward to moving beyond our own locked doors into the new light of the Kingdom.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, hear our prayer for our neighbourhood, for families and individual living in fear or uncertainty. May they find love and hope in whatever may be the “new normal.”

Remember for good all struggling with doubts, for whom faith does not bring comfort or strength. May they not give up, but find ways to seek answers to their questions. In their honesty may they find God.

Remember all who are sick and those who care for them. May they know the healing love of God in their bodies, minds and hearts and find strength for the challenges of their days.

Almighty God, we thank you for hearing our prayers, We commend all those on our hearts to your faithful love. We ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen