

## Easter 2, 2018

We are certainly in what we could call “Resurrection Season” now. This is an amazingly uplifting time of year when we will hear again about the spread of the early Christian church, and we will be reminded of how often things remain the same in this world. From now until Pentecost we will be hearing how the worries and divisions of this group of people we call Christians, mirror our own experiences today. This morning’s gospel gives us the reassurance that our human frailties are understood by God, in the shape of Thomas’ doubt, and also the incredible message bound up in the words “Peace be with you”.

We see the beginnings of the church – at first not too hopeful is it? Here, we get our first glimpse of the disciples gathered together after the resurrection, all in all, it is not a very pretty picture. Jesus had carefully prepared his disciples to be a devoted and confident fellowship of faith. They were to be a community of profound love with the gates wide open, but here we find them barricaded in a house with the doors bolted shut. They were to be the kind of people who stride boldly into the world to bear fruit in Jesus’ name, a people full of the Holy Spirit, but here we find them cowering in fear, hoping nobody will find out where they are before they get their alibis straight. In short, we see here the church at its worst - scared, disheartened and defensive. A church which was described by a theologian as a “church with sweaty palms and a timid spirit”.

So there we are, John gives us a snapshot of a church with no plan, a terrified little band huddled in the corner of a room with a chair braced against the door has only one thing going for it: the risen Christ. And that seems to be the main point of this story. In the final analysis, this is a story about how the risen Christ pushed open the bolted door of a church with nothing, how the risen Christ enters every church and fills the place with his own life. All those stories I said we would be hearing about in the next few weeks, well in all those stories from now until Ascension day, Jesus will keep appearing and refocusing his disciples until there is enough certainty to run with. And one of the first witnesses to all of this who speaks to us over the centuries is Thomas.

If you want an image of the fledgling church think of a small child learning to ride a bike and to start off they have training wheels and then mum or dad run along behind steadying the wobbles until finally the child can pedal furiously down the street confident in all they have learned. Well, this morning the baby church has training wheels.



I will tell you now that I really like Thomas. Thomas is a strong and faithful disciple not a whiney uncertain man as he is sometimes portrayed. There is not a lot about this disciple in the Bible but what there is shows him as a good man. When Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem the disciples thought that it would be certain death for all of them. But, it was Thomas who said: Then let us go so that we may die with him. It was a courageous statement, yet we don't remember him for that. Later in the gospel Jesus will say in my father's house are many rooms and I go to prepare a place for you, and you know the place where I am going – it is Thomas who is brave enough to say “we don't know where you are going how can we know the way?” He says what everyone else is thinking. Also in this story of Thomas we heard this morning, we have an amazing confession of faith, the Divinity of Christ is bluntly and unequivocally stated. “My Lord, and my God.” Not teacher, rabbi, brother. But God! It is uttered with conviction as if Thomas was simply recognizing a fact, just as  $2 + 2 = 4$ , and the sun is in the sky. You are my Lord and my God! These are certainly not the words of a doubter.

I think he doubts the other disciples. Thomas, as we heard, was not present when the resurrected Christ made an appearance to the disciples in a home in Jerusalem and when he heard about the event he refused to believe it. I like the idea that Thomas doubted the disciples, not Jesus; because when you look at them, he had good reason! He had been with Judas who betrayed Jesus, and Peter who had denied him. He had been with James and John fighting over who got to sit on the right and the left. Maybe the news of Jesus' resurrection simply sounded too good to be true. Thomas said: Unless I feel the nail prints in his hands I will not believe. I need information for myself. This is too important for me to just go along with the crowd. And I think that is a good thing, Thomas was not prepared to say ‘whatever’, he had to know for himself, he had to see for himself. You see if what the disciples said was true then everything was new again, all life began again. If it was false then was all their faith based on a lie or a misunderstanding.

One of Thomas' great virtues was that he absolutely refused to say that he understood what he did not understand, or that he believed what he did not believe. There was an uncompromising honesty about him: he would never still his doubts by pretending they did not exist. It takes a lot of courage to be that honest in our faith. The message here in the gospel is that it is all right to be still working at faith, it's just giving up that is not an option. I think that Thomas could not receive the peace that Christ offered until he had had the courage to voice his



doubts and fears, to talk things through and think things through with his community. We understand that I think. We are called to this life of community and to be at peace, Not a soppy kind of peace but a hard won peace that comes from a strong faith, faith that can answer that question I posed this time last year "Is Jesus alive or dead?" Do we kind of believe, or truly believe, is ours an anything goes, whatever kind of faith?

What do we believe that's the question. There is much that we have not seen and yet believe in this world. We rely on the proof of others, the knowledge they have, for our trust. For example, I may be able to use a computer quite well, and design documents and send emails, But can I explain to you how on earth I can type something, press send, and have it instantly sent around the world? Not a chance!

I also believe in the science that makes planes fly, cameras capture images of my children, I trust people I will never meet like St. Francis, to have something important to say about God. So many things I can't explain I believe. I am sure it's the same for you. But we don't click Jesus on and off like a camera, I see him in and through others he is sometimes obviously present and at other times seems quite elusive. But like Thomas there is a point when we are convinced about who Jesus was and IS, how he lived, and how he loved, and we want to follow him, we seek to live as he lived and love as he loved? Thomas wanted proof, and Jesus was able to give it to him. But "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

I believe that we hear this gospel every year on the second Sunday of Easter because as church, as children of God we are called to wrestle with the resurrection. It is a lesson that challenges us, tempts us to think that we would have not have needed proof but causes us to look at our lives and know that doubt is part of our human condition. Through the grace of God we come through doubt and into faith.

Just as people can express doubts in the resurrection, some people express doubts in the model of life of the Christian community. That we can live in peace with one another. We are called to show by word and example that the Christian life is real, that it is of value even though it seems so countercultural. It has been said that our daily life is a sermon shared with the world around us. Remember, seeing is believing - just as Thomas needed to see the wounds to believe, we have to show others about our faith and our walk with the risen Christ. We are called to reflect the love of Christ.



The risen Christ came to his disciples in the midst of their turmoil and fear. He came in the midst of their doubt and their sense of having failed both him and their own selves and said to them: "Peace be with you." And when he said this he showed them his wounds - the holes in his hands and in his side - as if to say: See these wounds it really is me; I really have overcome the worse things that anyone could do to another human being. His "peace be with you" was the declaration of a fact. Because Jesus lives nothing can separate his followers from him and from life in him. The disciples realized this fact and in realizing it received the peace that Jesus offered - the peace that only Jesus could offer - for without him they would have been left to continue alone in the darkness and fear of their locked room.

This morning, as we do every Sunday morning we will share the "Peace". Today's gospel reminds us just what it is that we are sharing. We are sharing an assurance of God's love, the promise of a relationship, hope for today and tomorrow. A gift of life. Jesus enters wherever we are and says "Peace be with you" ... he invites us to be present in the Easter moment that is not a Sunday, but is a way of life:

The peace of Jesus, the peace of God is inside us, it is part of us. We carry it with us and hopefully we make a conscious effort to share it with everyone we meet. Our lives reflect our certainty in a Jesus who walks beside us and lives in us and is totally available to everyone. Jesus does not say Peace be with you - well everyone except you Peter because you denied me. Peace be with you except you Thomas because you refused to believe, Peace be with you except for you James and John because you ran away. No he gives his peace to everyone and so must we. It is a sign of our faith. We can't share the peace in the middle of the service, receive the eucharist and then squabble by coffee time - it just doesn't work that way - or it shouldn't. We are called to share with joy and gladness because this peace that we talk about and that we wish on other people is something that is only found in Jesus Christ, you cannot buy it, secure it in isolation or keep quantities of it in the bank. It is a living breathing peace, it is real; just as our risen Christ is real. It shapes our behaviour, thoughts and prayers.

The joy, celebration, and exuberance, compassion, generosity and love that we will hear described in the Book of Acts over the next seven weeks -had only one plausible explanation: Jesus was with them. Because Jesus was with them, these same disciples who had hidden in that room, locked themselves away, those same disciples including Thomas now in faith, gave themselves on behalf of the broken, bruised, and battered; they shared their lives with the least

and the last. They had deep love for one another, compassion for their neighbors, and devotion to God. The early church was a vivid demonstration of the living Christ. Let us work together to make that a reality in this place.

AMEN