

EASTER 2B 11-04-21 *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Acts 4:32-37; Ps 133; 1 John 1:1 – 2:2; John 20:19-31

Acts 4.32-37

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'). He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

John 20.19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were 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. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.' A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The disciples were locked indoors, frightened and sad, and probably wondering whatever they were going to do now. In a fairly short time, the writer of the book of Acts would be able to write in glowing terms of the idyllic fellowship of the early church, where everything was shared and nobody missed out: but on this day, the first day of the week, they didn't know what to do. They didn't believe Mary when she said she'd seen the Lord; Peter and the beloved disciple had seen the empty tomb but didn't know what to make of it.

What happened to turn the scared little community of disciples into courageous apostles who went out preaching and teaching and healing and establishing more communities?

Jesus breathed new life into them, just as God breathed life into the very first humans at creation. The breath of God, the Spirit, brings life and energy and courage and enthusiasm.

When John wrote that 'the disciples' had met in the locked room, he didn't name any names or tell us how many were there. They represent all of us, all the disciples through the ages, and he tells us that his book was written so that we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that, believing, we might have life in his name.

Thomas missed out on this visit from Jesus and wasn't convinced by what his friends told him. Once he encountered the risen Jesus for himself he was convinced, and Jesus blessed all who would believe without having the kind of physical evidence that Thomas wanted.

It's interesting to note that a week after Jesus had first appeared to the disciples, when he came back again they were still in a room with the doors locked. So even after they saw the Lord, they were still too frightened to risk being out in the world.

It took more than one visit from Jesus to reassure them; like us, they took a while to catch on.

Those first disciples, who had fearfully locked themselves indoors, had personal experiences of Jesus that gradually changed them and led them into a whole-hearted commitment to a way of life centred on the risen Jesus.

They experienced the life-giving, energising breath of God's Spirit, which enabled them to devote themselves to living in community as they shared the good news.

They told people about Jesus, and they also demonstrated his new way of life by looking after the needy amongst them.

They practised the radical equality and inclusiveness that Jesus modelled and taught, so that women and men, slave and free, young and old were all welcomed into their fellowship.

The first disciples were finally able to leave the locked room and go out to share the love and life they had begun to experience for themselves. They are an example to us, an encouragement to leave the comfort and security of indoors and get out there amongst it.

There is no place in Christianity for a 'private' faith; you cannot be a secret believer. We need each other, we need to meet together for prayer and fellowship and breaking of bread, so we need to be part of a Christian community.

The first disciples and the infant church did not have an easy time of it; they needed to work out how to live as Easter people, and what it meant to follow Jesus now that he was no longer physically with them. There must have been times they were tempted to hide away in a locked room again- when it all got too hard, when people argued and disagreed, when their families and friends didn't understand why they wanted to follow Jesus.

We also face challenges, all these centuries later. As our society continues to move away from religious belief and observance, as our congregations dwindle, we might be tempted to shut the doors and keep to ourselves.

But we are Easter People! We know that even when all hope appears lost, there is resurrection and new life.

The Easter season lasts for fifty days, until the day of Pentecost when we celebrate the birth of the church and the gift of the Holy Spirit to all believers.

This is the season for joyful celebration. As Lent was the season for sober reflection, repentance, and preparation, so Easter is the season for thanksgiving as we bring to mind all that God has given us, the amazing grace that is our restored relationship with the Creator of the universe.

This is the season for sharing the Good News, if ever there was one! We may not all be eloquent evangelists but we can talk with our families and friends and colleagues about who it is that inspires our lives.

We can invite our friends along to special services or parish events. We can tell people what a good time we have at Easter or Pentecost or Christmas and ask if they'd like to come with us next time.

We are Easter People and we come together to worship and praise God who raised Jesus from the dead. All the hours of the week that we are NOT here gathered together, we are **still** Easter People; our lives need still to be focussed on the risen Jesus as we ask God to show us how to live.

May we be brave enough to step outside and leave our 'comfort zone' to share our faith, and let people know that God's love is for them too.

The Lord be with you.