

EASTER 2C 24-04-22 *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 118:14-29; Revelation 1:4-8; 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.

Have you ever been to a bank or Centrelink or some such institution which required 100 points of identification? You know, they have those complicated systems that say you can make up the points with your passport and driving licence or a paid bill or student card or birth certificate: and they usually want one with a photo on it.

Remember when we all needed to set up the ServiceWA app on our phones and had to access different forms of identification? It was a nightmare!

When we read about the resurrection appearances of Jesus, it appears that people didn't immediately recognise him. He didn't have photo ID.

When Mary saw him outside the tomb early on Easter morning she thought he was the gardener, until he spoke her name. And in today's section of John's gospel we hear of an event that happened later the same day, when there seems to have been similar uncertainty about the identity of Jesus.

The disciples were together in a locked room. We are not told who was present, except that Thomas wasn't there. Jesus appeared, said 'Peace be with you', and then showed them the marks in his hands and side: his 'proof of identity'.

Only then did the disciples 'rejoice when they saw the Lord'. Did they all fail to recognise Jesus? Did he look different? Were they all too frightened to realise it was him? We can only speculate.

Jesus said again, 'Peace be with you.' I wonder if they were so excited that he needed to calm them down; or perhaps they were just overwrought, given the events of the past few days.

When Thomas came back from wherever he'd been, all he wanted was the same proof of identity that Jesus had given his friends.

So when Jesus came back a week later, that's what he got: evidence that the person in front of him was the one who had been flogged, nailed to a cross and hung there until he died. Thomas could see for himself that it was really Jesus, alive and standing in front of him.

Our translation tells us that Jesus said to Thomas, 'Do not doubt but believe.' The Greek says something more like 'Do not be unbelieving but believe', which is perhaps subtly different.

Thomas only wanted proof, evidence of the identity of the person who his friends had seen the week before. Then he was happy to believe- ecstatic, in fact!

All of us are here today because we, like Thomas, want to believe that there is something in all this religious stuff that we can feel and see, something that makes a difference. We all have times when we find it hard to believe; it can be hard to believe that God loves the world when we see some of the terrible things happening right now. Some events or situations really push our capacity for maintaining our faith. There is a wonderful prayer found in Mark chapter 9 verse 24; the father of an epileptic boy has asked Jesus to heal his son, and he says “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” Thomas could have prayed this prayer; I’m sure he wanted to believe that Jesus was alive and had appeared to Mary and the others. Perhaps it seemed too good to be true; he needed to be convinced.

Once he *was* convinced, Jesus said to him, “You have believed because you saw me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” This blessing is for us, today, as it has been for every believer ever since. Jesus is blessing us because we have faith in him even though we haven’t seen him.

Jesus blessed his disciples with peace and breathed the Spirit of life into them. However, this wasn’t the peace of a quiet, long and happy life: this was the peace and joy that enabled them to leave the safety of their locked room and go back out into the world to carry on the mission that Jesus had passed on to them. With the gift of the Spirit they could continue to bring to people all that Jesus brought; the message of the Kingdom, offered to everyone and including forgiveness, healing and eternal life.

We heard Peter, in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles, boldly telling the gospel to the council of religious leaders and elders. Peter, who had denied Jesus out of fear for his own skin, now had the courage to speak up despite the risk. He and the unnamed apostles with him were flogged before being released. As far as we know, none of the apostles had a long and quiet life because they insisted on talking about Jesus when it was illegal to belong to the movement and dangerous to tell people about it. What changed them from being so scared that they locked themselves away into the fearless evangelists they became? The only difference was their experience of the presence of the risen Jesus. Their unbelief and fear melted away as the Spirit filled them with peace and power.

The writer of the gospel of John tells us why he wrote his book in verse 31 of this chapter. He wrote these things so that we- the readers and hearers- may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing we may have life in his name.

The writer included this story of Thomas’s journey of faith to encourage us to take the same journey, and to move from unbelief to belief.

When we meet for worship, we come into awareness of the presence of the Risen Christ. The Spirit of Life surrounds and fills us as we gather around the Lord’s table and we join in communion with all the saints. Strengthened by the holy meal we share, our mission- should we choose to accept it- is to go from here and be Jesus-people. We are to show and tell the world, if necessary using words, what it means to be blessed with the peace of God. May our lives bring life to others, as we follow the Lord of life. The Lord be with you.