

Sunday Sermon Notes – 2nd Sunday of Easter 19th April 2020

From Rev'd Jilleen Chambers

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

This Sunday, it is four weeks since we were last gathered as the Body of Christ in St Mary's and St Matthias'. Four weeks of learning to sing, pray and be the people of God in a strange land. How have we done? What have we learned afresh about God and God's presence with us in this confusing time? As I type this, the Queensland Premier is declaring on TV that this time of social distancing will continue, at least for the next few weeks.

We have experienced what it is to live in social isolation; had to remember to sanitise our hands when we go shopping and return home again; to keep two arms lengths away from people we do not live with; and only see our children and grandchildren via Facetime. Many have found forgotten projects to finish, caught up on reading, cleaning, and gardening, and now some of us are wondering what to do next. I have finally had the time to extract files, including parish photos for the website, from my old lap-top before it dies.

For a people who relish the Greeting of Peace on Sunday, this time of being absent from each other has been very difficult and many of us are hungry for human fellowship. Though it has been wonderful to hear reports of how we are staying in touch with one another via the phone. Keep it happening. This time too shall pass and we can rejoice in the knowledge that God is always with us wherever we are.

This Sunday we continue telling the Easter story – it is too wonderful and life giving to only tell it on one Sunday of the year. And it provides us with another piece of our puzzle in the God story. Can we really believe that Jesus has risen from the dead? Does God understand our doubts, our hopes and our fears?

In our Gospel reading from John 20:19-31, the disciples are fearfully gathered behind locked doors. (I would like to have been a fly on the wall.) The women had reported that Jesus' body had disappeared from the tomb, they told of an angel, grave linen lying in the empty tomb; and Mary Magdalene had excitedly told them about seeing and speaking with Jesus – and she had been given a message for them. Can you imagine some of the discussion and the fear that would have permeated the room? – Who took the body? Where is it? Surely the women were delirious with grief. Now the temple authorities will accuse us of taking Jesus' body. Can what the women said be true? Surely not, we saw him die.

Suddenly, Jesus is there in the room with them. 'Peace be with you.' To dispel their fears that he is a ghost, Jesus shows them his hands and his side. To say that the disciples were overjoyed is probably putting it very mildly. Jesus, the one they had seen crucified is alive! And it really is him – they could see the wounds of crucifixion in his body. He is flesh: he is not a ghost! Jesus breathes on them, 'receive the Holy Spirit' and he commissions them to go out into the world with his message of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Poor Thomas. He always gets a bit of a bad rap. He didn't believe what the other disciples told him. He wasn't with them that first evening and I suspect he thought he was the only sane one left. He didn't want to get his hopes up and then have them dashed again if what they said wasn't true. If Jesus had really risen from the dead, he wanted physical proof that it was him and not a ghost. He wanted to see and touch Jesus' wounds. He wanted the first-hand experience of the risen Jesus that the other disciples had had.

I have always wondered why Jesus waited a week to come back. Sometimes he waits to give us space and time to absorb what is happening around us. And to look at our own hearts and feelings; to examine our doubts and fears. Are we ready to accept what God wants to tell us or show us?

The wonderful thing is, Jesus did come back and he knew how Thomas was feeling. He doesn't reprimand Thomas for his doubts instead Jesus invites him to reach out his hand and touch. Jesus is really alive! In this interaction between Jesus and Thomas, we see a beautiful picture of God's compassion and understanding and his care for the broken hearted. We do not know if Thomas did touch Jesus but he makes that wonderful leap of faith 'My Lord, and my God!'

I am glad Thomas was a sceptic. If you can convince a sceptic who held out against the witness of the ten other disciples, then it must be real. I heard of one sceptic who was convinced of the physical resurrection of Jesus by Luke 24: 41-43 – they gave Jesus a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in their presence. Jesus was a physical person. This man did not like broiled fish – if Jesus could eat broiled fish, then the story of his resurrection must be true. The gospels do not give us a biography or a blow by blow picture of Jesus, but it is the little things like broiled fish that give them the added ring of eyewitness truth.

This story shows us that Jesus understands our doubts and fears for he knows us individually just as he knew Thomas' feelings of hurt and loss. Jesus takes the time to reveal himself to us. He also blesses us and all who have not seen him physically and have come to believe because of the testimony of those first eyewitnesses. And how can we know that what they said is true? Relationship. This story has been guarded and carefully handed on from one generation to the next over the intervening centuries. Many people have died rather than recant their belief in Jesus and his resurrection. It is a truth that gave them life. It is a truth that invites us into relationship with the living Lord Jesus; a truth that brings hope and peace to our hearts and lives in troubled times.

The Gospel reading continues: '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. And what is the life we now have? It Life with a capital 'L'. It is not only the promise of eternal life that Jesus' resurrection opens to us. It is the wonder of a living relationship with Jesus here and now and the gift of the Holy Spirit to encourage and strengthen us as we rejoice in Father's presence with us each day of our lives. It is Life that gives us Hope. And hope does not disappoint because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. Rom 3: 5.

Thomas' declaration of faith: 'My Lord, and my God?' brings the Gospel of John full circle back to it's initial declaration about Jesus. In the first chapter of John vs 1 we read: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' And in vs 14 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.' Jesus is truly God, the Son.

I will miss singing my favourite hymn on Sunday – 'Be thou my vision'
Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, naught be all else to me save that thou art
thou my best thought, by day or by night, waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Even more, I will miss your presence and your smiling faces.
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Take care and the Lord be with you.

Blessings Jilleen