

FAITH AND PEACE

The events in our Gospel reading take place on Easter evening – the same day that the disciples have found the empty tomb and Mary had seen the risen Jesus.

But the disciples are locked into an upper room for fear of the Jews. Fear of the Jewish leaders who had been behind the plot to kill Jesus, they were afraid for their own lives, and afraid of their uncertain futures.

It's perhaps unsurprising that they were afraid, we imagine that they were traumatized by the crucifixion and frightened about what might happen next.

Think about what it was like for those first disciples – think what they had witnessed. There was the emotional Thursday evening when he got down on the floor and washed all their feet and then shared supper with them. There was the agony in the garden, their inability to stay awake to support him while he prayed. There was the betrayal by one of their own inner circle, followed by Jesus's arrest and the fracas that surrounded that. There was the denial by Peter, the crowds shouting for him to be crucified. His trial, his torture, and finally his crucifixion and then burial. This is just 2 days later! Just imagine how they must have been feeling as he comes through a locked door now to join them! Joy. Sadness. Confusion. Guilt. Fear. And Jesus simply says 'Peace be with you'.

He showed the same grace and mercy and forgiveness and love that he always showed. He says Peace be with You twice and then he shows them his wounds. They must have been overjoyed – not only was he alive, but he had forgiven them for all they had done, or not done, over those last dramatic days.

This is a slight aside now - The one thing that always puzzles me is that his resurrected body must have looked the same as before as the disciples recognised him, but it must have had very different qualities as he's now able to enter through a closed door! And it must feel the same - as Thomas touches his wounds!? And in Luke 24 v 43 we are told he eats with them too. Like us, but not like us!? I don't have an answer, it's just an observation to ponder on!

So back on track - After his entry through the locked door and twice blessing them with his peace - he then breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit! This is a strong echo of God's creation story in Genesis 2 v 7 – “the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” As the Father did in the beginning so the Son did to those first disciples, enabling them to have the strength to stand up, unlock the door, go outside and begin spreading the word. We in turn receive the Holy Spirit at our baptism and our confirmation – when we are made new creations in Christ – we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

But Thomas had been missing that evening and he couldn't quite believe what the others told him. So Jesus comes back a week later – and they've still got the door locked – so I think this implies that it wasn't just Thomas who was the only one needing further reassurance that Jesus had in fact conquered death! Again he blesses them with his peace - a parallel of the scene the week before. But this time there is no mention of any fear amongst them.

Jesus doesn't berate Thomas or condemn him – he offers him evidence and Thomas is the very symbol of each and every one of us. He is an ordinary person with all his fears and doubts. Jesus simply tells him (and us) to believe and have faith in Him.

When Thomas saw Jesus's wounds he immediately said “my Lord and my God”. And this is the highest confession made by anyone in the gospel – the greatest doubter becomes the greatest believer! Thomas actually ended up dying in India having taken the gospel there. He died a martyr. That doesn't sound like a doubter. It sounds like someone who grew and changed.

We too are continuing Jesus's mission – we are the body of Christ in the world. We are all part of God's plan – our words, our deeds, our hope, our faith, our love, our witness in our daily lives, our acts of love to others - are all done in Jesus' name with the help of the Holy Spirit. These are the ways the rest of the world catches a glimpse of our risen Lord.

But, like the disciples, it's only natural when anxious or threatened to hunker down and lock those doors – but nothing can keep Jesus out, he can enter the room – even if we've securely and firmly locked the door. And he keeps coming back again and again until we unlock the door and go out.

Like the disciples – each and every one of us is trying to live a worthy life, struggling with doubt, weighed down with fear, and constantly falling short of what we know he expects from us. But Jesus comes to us – in the midst of our doubts and fears and sin and guilt to offer each and every one of us that simple word of grace, and mercy and forgiveness – Peace be with you. The peace that surpasses all understanding, the peace that the world cannot give, the peace that can only come from the risen Lord, and the peace that comes when we need it most.

We are called to share that peace and that joy with a world filled with doubt and fear. He joined them in that upper room to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit and to send them out into the world to continue his mission.

By doing this he changes them from disciples into apostles. Disciple means one who learns, apostle means one who is sent. He has taught them about the Kingdom of God, about his heavenly Father's purpose for them and for the world – now he sends them out.

We are all in the same position....we are all sent out... we can all be his apostles. But how might that look? Unlike Thomas we are very unlikely to head to another continent to spread the word. However opportunities come our way, they don't need to be forced or created artificially. Inviting someone to come with you to church, listening to a friend's problems or worries and simply telling them that you will include them in your prayers. And by being the bringers of faith and peace into each and every situation...in these ways we live the gospel and share the light of Christ with the world.

Amen

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