

EASTER 2

28.4.19

“Jesus came and stood among them”

Acts 2: 32-35

1 John 1.1-2.2

John 20.19-end

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus

came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ **A week later** his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, as you came among your friends and disciples, the risen Christ, and filled the room with joy and hope, so come among us now, open to us your scriptures and breath your Spirit into the words that I have prepared. In the name of the Father ...

A lot can happen in a week – and it is now a week since Easter Day.

Easter Day saw the bombings in Sri Lanka targeting Christians for their faith.

It is hard for us to come to terms with such violence in the safety of our little churches here. We pray for them.

By all accounts the response of this persecution has been very gracious – the Christians there are determined not to fall into the trap of seeking retribution.

But perhaps those caught up in the violence are struggling to come to terms with what has happened while they worshipped – and perhaps ask the question: *Where is God in all of this?*

The Second Sunday of Easter is when we start to come to terms with the awesome happenings of Easter, in slow time.

It is a time when the readings offered by the lectionary are about the disciples coming to term with the amazing happenings of Easter.

About events such as Jesus appearing in the upper room and about so-called ‘doubting Thomas’.

About what the disciples did as a result of their experience, and how they and their understanding of Jesus was forever changed.

The Second Sunday of Easter is a time when Christians, many miles and years away from those Biblical events can also ask themselves questions like ‘can it be true?’ and ‘if it’s true what does it mean for me?’

The reading from the Acts of the Apostles has the verse:

God has raised Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.

Meanwhile, our Gospel reading tells two stories:

The first is a story of Easter Day:

Jesus came and stood among his disciples.
He greeted them in peace and they were overcome with joy.

He then he breaths the Holy Spirit upon them just as he had promised he would. A new life has been born, reminiscent of the Spirit of God at Creation.

The second story is about Thomas.

He had missed seeing Jesus risen from the dead on Easter Day and understandably he tells his fellow disciples that he wont believe until he has seen the wounds of Christ for himself.

A week has gone by and Jesus has been trying to reach Thomas all week, and Jesus suddenly appears again.

And maybe Jesus has been trying to reach you all week – and is asking you – do you believe that what happened last week on Easter Day is true?

I believe that Jesus tries to speak to us every day – trouble is, we're never in!

But again Jesus greets the disciples in peace.

He shows Thomas his wounded hands, tells him to stop doubting and instead to believe.

Thomas is so stunned that he falls down to the ground and worships Jesus.

Finally St John tells us that he has written this Gospel to help **us** to **believe and to understand** that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name.

The words “Doubt” and “Thomas” have gone together since this passage was first written.

Poor Thomas ... I mean, what would we have been like?

He is known as Didymus – the Twin.

We don't know who his twin was – but here's a question for you ... are you twinned with Thomas?

Are you a doubting Thomas?

Here are some quotations about doubt:

The first is a good one for preachers:

It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.

The second is one from Mark Twain:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

The third is from Pope Francis:

If one has the answers to all the questions - that is the proof that God is not with him.

It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself.

The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt.

You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble.

We often sing about doubt:

Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me bring your love;

Where there is injury your pardon, Lord;

And where there's doubt true faith in you.

A prayer attributed to St Francis.

When we think about the stories of Easter, the story of the cross, the discovery of the empty tomb, even the stories of the encounters with the risen Christ – we can imagine the scenes.

The Gospels are full of tiny eye-witness details:

- The folded linen in the tomb,
- The breaking of a loaf of bread at the meal at Emmaus,
- Jesus on the shore, cooking fish,
- The wounds of Christ, his hands and his side,

All show that he is alive, scarred, wounded, but risen from death, in a way that we can imagine.

We can picture him standing in that Upper Room before his dumbfounded disciples.

We can picture him standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

In fact, it is comparatively easy to know these stories to be true – even beyond doubt, because we are so familiar with them.

But...if the stories of the resurrection are true – and really happened - then they are true *now*. And if they are true *now*, then Jesus is risen among us here in this church.

He is here – now.

And so the question is, are you like Thomas? Do you need further proof in order to believe?

Has Jesus been trying to reach you all week?

I rather like that verse at the very end of Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 28:

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

You know, certainty is so often overrated.

Because you see, faith cannot block out darkness, or doubt.

When on the cross, Jesus did not cry out "*Here I come!*"

but "*My God, why have you forsaken me?*"

His disciples brimmed with doubts and misgivings.

Just as courage is persisting in the face of fear, so faith is persisting in the presence of doubt.

Faith becomes then a commitment, a practice and a pact that is usually sustained by belief.

But doubt can also be a strength.

Doubt acknowledges our own limitations and confirms — or challenges — fundamental beliefs, and is a crucial part of faith.

Many influential Christian writers, like Calvin and C.S. Lewis, have acknowledged times of uncertainty.

Mother Teresa, once startled the world when her posthumous diaries revealed that she was tormented by a continual gloom and aching to see, or sense, God.

In 1953 she wrote,

"Please pray specially for me that I may not spoil His work and that Our Lord may show

Himself — for there is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead. It has been like this more or less from the time I started 'the work.'"

And yet by this work, she helped many thousands of people.

In recent weeks we have seen how Jesus wept at the graveside of his friend Lazarus.

We have also seen him weeping in Gethsemane, where he made the decision to go through the nightmare of crucifixion.

And then last Sunday we had the reading for Easter Day when the angels ask Mary Magdalene why she was crying.

And then Jesus appears and asks her the same question: "*Why are you crying?*"

And in contrast, in our Gospel reading today, Jesus appears to his disciples in the upper room and we are told:

"The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord."

What an understatement, because they were beside themselves with joy!

Suddenly we have a theology of hope. Death does not have the final word.

Our Gospel of hope is made for this world, but I suspect that for many it will come to fruition in the next.

Because there is no getting away from the realities of the Good Fridays of life, the traumas that feed our doubts, but God has filled them with his presence.

He can redeem them, and as our savior, he is rescuing us, just as he gathers the good people of Sri Lanka, into his eternal peace.

Thomas recognized Jesus by his wounds. It was the scars left behind in Christ's body that reveal his true identity and remove all doubt in Thomas.

Thomas had made the mistake of withdrawing from the Christian fellowship and because he wasn't there, he missed the risen Christ and he doubted the reality.

When we withdraw from the life of the church, we miss more than we could possibly know, and perhaps miss an encounter with the risen Christ.

But Jesus graciously comes looking for us.

Thomas didn't find Christ, he found Thomas.

And often, it is true for us:

"I didn't find Christ, he found me".

And Jesus found Thomas and showed him his scars.

Thomas responds in worship.

As we are found of Christ, let us worship him, and as we do, our faith and trust will deepen.

Amen.