

Sunday 19th April 2020

As we spend another Sunday at home let us hear these words from St John's Gospel.

John 20:19 – 20

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week Jesus came and stood among the disciples 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.

Let us continue to rejoice because even during these hard times that same risen Lord Jesus that met with his disciples still meets with us today. May our rejoicing be heard as we witness to our belief in the risen Lord even in these strange days.

A Prayer of confession

When we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Lord and God, true Christian fellowship exists. Even though we are not gathered together to worship that true Christian fellowship still exists and in our own homes we are encouraged to worship God, to give thanks for Jesus Christ and to witness to the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We confess that especially in these times we are feeling afraid perhaps abandoned, and lonely; and perhaps it feels as if our lives are bereft of God's presence; desolate times like these can lead us to question and doubt our faith. But God reassures us that we are not alone, he is standing with us and he longs to bring to us his joy and peace of mind .

Lord Jesus Christ, unlike those first disciples, we cannot touch you or see you, and so it is all too easy to become downcast and give in to despair.
Forgive us when, like the disciples, we find the truth of Easter hard to believe.
Come to us, risen Christ. Come through the closed doors of our hearts and minds as well as those of our homes and take away our fears and doubts.
Come to us, risen Christ. Breathe on us and fill us with the joy and peace of your presence.
Bless us all as people who have not seen you but who believe that you are truly the risen Christ, Son of God. Amen

I encourage you to find your Bible (or go to www.biblegateway.com) and read these two passages set for today

EPISTLE: 1 Peter 1: 3-9 (This I think is my favourite passage in the Bible)

GOSPEL: John 20:19-31

Some thoughts:

I'm sure there are times when we say "stop pulling the wool over my eyes" when we question the truth of what we are being told.

Thomas was saying something like that to his fellow disciples when they told him that they had seen the risen Christ. Come on, you can hear Thomas saying, quit pulling the wool over my eyes and give me the truth. So - Jesus gave him the truth

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in person. And a no doubt mortified Thomas, responds with the confession: "My Lord and my God!"

As is the case with most stories, there is more to this story than meets the eye. It is not simply about belief and disbelief, it's not simply a reproach to those who believe only what they can see. It tells us something highly important about Jesus, about Thomas and about ourselves.

First, this appearance of the risen Jesus, like all his appearances, tells us something of supreme importance about Jesus himself. It tells us that Jesus has chosen to remain human forever. True - there are differences between his humanity before and after Easter. Jesus' risen flesh does not have the limitations of our earthbound bodies. Doors cannot keep him out - but it is still the flesh that stopped breathing on a cross - still bearing the marks of Calvary. But it is permeated with God's Spirit, God's life.

The gospel also tells us something significant about Thomas. At first, he is portrayed as refusing to believe his peers, demanding to probe the very wounds of Jesus. Yet, he moves impressively from disbelief to genuine faith when Jesus appears and offers him the proof he has asked for. The gospel does not say that Thomas did actually take up Jesus' offer, instead, we can picture him perhaps sinking to his knees with that cry "My Lord and my God"

We might say "So what?" Thomas still had his proof right there in front of him. Thomas could see his hands; why would he need to touch them? He had as much proof as the rest of the disciples a week before. So, who wouldn't believe? Wouldn't we? We don't know because of course we weren't there. But, the episode with Thomas draws from Jesus words that certainly speak directly to us. "Do you believe because you see me?" Jesus asks Thomas, and then says these marvellous words about faith: "How happy are those who believe without seeing me."

When John was writing his gospel, the vast majority of Christians had not seen Christ. And so John relates this scene to make it clear that they too are blessed, fortunate, happy. They are not inferior to those who did see the risen Lord. They too share in the joy ushered in by Jesus' resurrection. Whether one has seen Jesus or not, is relatively unimportant. What is of supreme importance is to believe.

Jesus does not show us the print of the nails, the mark of the spear. If he were to appear right beside you, and say "Examine my hands, put your hand into my side." I suspect that even the most sceptical of us might exclaim: "My Lord" if not "My God."

But such is not our situation. Yet Christ is not removed from us, he is present, as he promised when he said "Where two or three are gathered in his name". The trouble is, we cannot see him, we cannot touch him. Perhaps it's rather like the situation we find ourselves in today. We can't see or touch so many of those we love. But that doesn't stop us believing that they are real. While we can't see (other than virtually) or touch our loved ones we can still let them know that we love them. Let us in the same way reach out to the risen Christ and express our faith and say that we love him. Can we like Thomas say today "My Lord and my God!"

The Lord's Prayer

A Prayer for those struggling due to this crisis, and for those seeking to help them

So many are worried, Lord.
Calm their fears.

So many are despairing.
Encourage them.

So many are hurting.
Tend their wounds.

So many are sick.
Heal them.
So many are seeking to bring help to
those infected.

So many are grieving.
Comfort them.

Equip and enable them.

So many are lonely.
Assure them of your presence.

So many are looking to defeat this
disease.
Guide them.

So many are vulnerable.
Protect them.

So many are struggling to make ends
meet.
Provide for them.

So many are in need, Lord,
and so many more soon will be.
Reach out to them,
in love, tenderness and mercy,
and see them safely through.
Amen.

A blessing

Go...

with the love of God enfolding you,
the peace of Jesus Christ within you,
and the breath of the Holy Spirit inspiring you. **AMEN**