

Second Sunday after Easter

Readings: Psalm 16. John 20:19-31

Psalm 16:

A Prayer of Confidence

¹Protect me, O God; I trust in you for safety.

²I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
all the good things I have come from you."

³How excellent are the LORD's faithful people!
My greatest pleasure is to be with them.

⁴Those who rush to other gods
bring many troubles on themselves.

I will not take part in their sacrifices;

I will not worship their gods.

⁵You, LORD, are all I have,
and you give me all I need;
my future is in your hands.

⁶How wonderful are your gifts to me;
how good they are!

⁷I praise the LORD, because he guides me,
and in the night my conscience warns me.

⁸I am always aware of the LORD's presence;
he is near, and nothing can shake me.

⁹And so I am thankful and glad,
and I feel completely secure,

¹⁰because you protect me from the power of death.

I have served you faithfully,

and you will not abandon me to the world of the dead.

¹¹You will show me the path that leads to life;

your presence fills me with joy

and brings me pleasure for ever.

John 20:19-31

Jesus Appears to his Disciples

(Mt 28.16–20; Mk 16.14–18; Lk 24.36–49)

¹⁹It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. ²⁰After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.” ²²Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

Thomas said to them, “Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then stretch out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!”

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

²⁹Jesus said to him, “Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!”

The Purpose of this Book

³⁰In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. ³¹But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.

Reflection:

If you ever wonder how the readings for each Sunday are chosen, then let me give you a little insight. Sometimes a minister will choose readings that he or she wishes to preach on, or which suit a particular occasion in the church, such as a baptism or special celebration. Sometimes they will choose a reading as they are preaching on a specific Bible theme or character and they wish the readings to reflect this. However, on many Sundays ministers will turn to a book known as The Revised Common Lectionary. This book consists of a table of Scripture readings for each Sunday and for other Holy days such as Holy Week. There is generally a Psalm, an Old Testament and a New Testament reading. The table is arranged in a three year cycle and if it followed for the whole three years then the majority of the Bible will be covered, although not all of it. I have been using the Lectionary during my time at Meldrum and Bourtie.

On many occasions, not least during this current lockdown, I have been amazed at how appropriate the Lectionary readings are to our situation. And today's readings, from which I have chosen the Psalm and the Gospel readings fit right into to where we are today. Psalm 16 is, as its' title suggests, a 'Prayer of Confidence', and reading it aloud whilst sitting alone at home is a truly uplifting experience. A prayer that speaks of confidence in God, acknowledges that all we have comes from Him, and finds comfort, joy and security in knowing God's presence with us, together with the knowledge that even death cannot part us from God's love. May I encourage you to read and ponder!

The New Testament reading from John's Gospel, follows on from the story of the morning on Easter Day, when Mary Magdalene had gone to Jesus' tomb, only to find it empty. She rushes back and with Peter and John returns again to the tomb. Peter and John see for themselves that the body of Jesus is no longer there, but then they leave. It is Mary, on her own in the garden, that is the first to see the risen Lord, although she doesn't recognise Him at first. Jesus instructs her to go and tell the others what she has seen, which she rushes back to do.

So now we move on to late on the same Sunday evening. The disciples are gathered together in a locked room. A little like us! Unlike us, they don't have the benefit of modern technology, they can't keep in touch with the outside world via the telephone, or email, or social media. All they can do is stay within the four walls of their room, scared and afraid. Will the Jewish authorities seek them out and do to them what they did to Jesus? They have heard rumours that Jesus has risen from the dead - Peter and John have told them of finding the burial clothes folded and left in the tomb. Mary has come with an even more amazing story of meeting with Jesus in the garden - not a ghost - but a walking talking real-life Jesus. Oh, how I wish we could have been a fly on the wall in that

room that night. What discussions happened? Who talked, and who just listened? What is going to happen next? Or to put it in today's terms - they are in lockdown, they aren't go out for fear of who or what may be outside, they have heard rumours that things are changing but can't be sure for themselves and what they really need to know is what is the exit strategy?

How are they going to move on, and get back to some sort of normality?

And it is at this point, that Jesus appears to them in the room....in the locked room. He didn't knock on the door, he just appeared. I wonder, if they too, like Mary, found it difficult to recognise Jesus for we read that it was when he showed them his hands and his side, that his disciples were overjoyed at seeing him again. Did they need to see those scars to recognise who Jesus was? Or perhaps, was Jesus showing them the scars to show that things were changing.

Jesus actions on the cross had changed everything.

Jesus has accomplished what He set out to do, death is defeated and our relationship with God is restored. The scars are the proof of that.

His work is done.

Jesus is now handing the work on to them.

Firstly, he gives them His Peace, and then he sends them out to continue His work. 'Just as the Father sent me, so I send you.' But, as always with God, he equips them for the job in hand. Or as someone put it 'God never chooses the equipped, He equips the chosen.' Jesus breathed on them and said 'Receive the Holy Spirit' - all the equipment they will need.

The story continues, however, with the arrival of Thomas. He wasn't there when Jesus appeared and so, despite being told the news by the friends he had spent the last three years with, he refuses to believe unless he sees for himself. Thomas has to wait a week before Jesus appears again, in a locked room (so we can only assume they were still in hiding most of the time), and challenges Thomas to do what he needed to do to believe - put his fingers on the scars and his hand in Jesus side. However, perhaps Thomas has softened over the week for just seeing Jesus is finally believing for Thomas. Jesus at this point chastises Thomas gently. 'Do you believe because you see me? (In other words: 'Weren't you prepared to believe the truth that your friends have been telling you?')'How happy are those who believe without seeing me!'

So we have two parts to this story, first the appearance to the disciples who are then charged with going and telling the world what has happened. But then the very first person they tell, their friend and fellow disciple, Thomas, doesn't believe them. It can't have done much for their confidence! But then we hear Jesus' encouragement to them, and to us who follow, that when we tell the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others, we will bring joy and happiness to those who hear and believe.

So for yet another week we continue to be in our own 'locked rooms'. But despite us not being able to go out, Jesus will come to us where we are. He will again whisper 'Peace be with you', and he will renew in us the gift of His Holy Spirit. We can, and should, use this time as a gift in which to deepen our relationship with Him. For the time will come when, like those first disciples, we can go out again and then we can spread the Good News of Jesus.

Finally, there is a tantalising verse in today's reading which always leaves me asking 'Why didn't you write more?'. The verse is v30 - 'In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book', - Why not??! I would love to have read anything more that they may have written. but my question is answered with v31 'But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.' In reality, saying, that what they have written should be enough to convince us. Unlike the disciples and Thomas for whom seeing is believing, for us hearing, or reading, is believing.

So, in our 'locked room' at this time, may I encourage you to read what *has* been written down. Use this precious time to sit in Jesus' company by reading what the Gospels have written about Him. Learn more about Him, discover things you may not have seen before. Listen to online services and sermons. Like those first scared disciples - Jesus will come to you where you are and will speak to you through those things - 'that through your faith in Him you may have life'. Talk to Him about your concerns and worries and unbelief. Then feel His Spirit restore you but most of all, I pray, may you feel His Peace enfold you.

Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXPgVL-5LGo>

Prayer:

Lord, in this stillness, speak to us;
in this emptiness, come to us and fill us;
in our troubles, come with your peace;
in our weakness, come with your strength;
in our doubts and fears, abide with us.
Still the storms within us and let us find peace in you.
Help us to be the people you want us to be,
and to achieve what you want us do to,
That when we leave this place we may go out in confidence,
to speak of you, and serve you all our days.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

Amen

(from Prayers for Reflection by David Adam)