**John 20:19-End Reflection 19th April 2020**

One of the readings for the second Sunday of Easter is John’s gospel, chapter 20. The disciples are on lockdown, afraid of Jews and what they might do to them after the terrible death of Jesus, a few days before. And we today can relate to that image of isolation and separation from the world. But the events that John describes, point to a great and glorious revelation.

Peter and John had been to and seen the empty tomb for themselves and they'd heard Mary Magdalene announcing to them, that she had seen the Lord. She had also given them Jesus’ message: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

John takes us into that locked room, to the moment when ‘Jesus came and stood among them’ and spoke to them.

I find the often overlooked detail, that Jesus came and stood AMONG them, quite extraordinary. There is an intimacy about it with Jesus, who is now alive, standing with them in their very midst. He is not distant or aloof, but present. And then Jesus says those words that we use so regularly in a Sunday service: “Peace be with you.”

He says these words of peace to those disciples who had abandoned him during the trial and the next day, at the cross. They see his hands and his side, that bear those terrible scars that witness against them, and point to Jesus’ sacrifice for them and the world.

Have you noticed that the disciples are not recorded as saying anything, other than a response of gladness at seeing the Lord. It all focuses on Jesus and he speaks those words of grace a second time to them: “Peace be with you.”

But Jesus doesn’t stop with those words of comfort, because there is work to do. He continues: “As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you.” There is a commissioning going on here. And to confirm it, he breathed on them so that they would receive the Holy Spirit. They will receive the Holy Spirit in its fullness in the days to come at Pentecost. But here, at this moment, there is some sense that they are receiving God’s Holy Spirit. This is to help them, in their commission to take the Lord’s forgiveness out into the world.

It is a wonderful close encounter with our living Jesus Christ, but one disciple was missing, Thomas. Who when arriving later, would not believe: “Unless I see in his hands and the mark of the nails, and place my fingers into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Thomas’ refusal to believe, is a very strong statement: “I will never believe”. The disciples had seen but he had not, and until he saw for himself, he would not believe.

The focus of the text here, is about ‘seeing and believing’ and Thomas stands in the place of the reader of the Gospel – Ones who have not seen.

After a full 8 days, Jesus came and stood among them, once more. He again brings those wonderful words: “Peace be with you.” Then turning to Thomas, he responds to Thomas’ words as if he was present when Thomas had said them 8 days previously: “Put your finger here, see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

Thomas, can only answer: “My Lord and my God!”

Notice the “My” here. It suggests that Thomas has truly had a personal encounter with Jesus, and his understanding has now changed. No longer is Jesus just an extraordinary man, who taught brilliantly, performed miracles and then died in failure. But now he understands truly, believing that Jesus is alive as his Lord and God. All that Jesus has said and promised was true and real.

It is an enormous moment of transition for Thomas. Meeting with Jesus changed everything for him. And Jesus goes on to help him understand the bigger picture by asking him: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those, who have not seen and yet had believed.”

In this telling of these events, I think that St John has given us 2 main points to focus on:

The first is when Jesus commissions the disciples and breathes on them, giving them the Holy Spirit. They know that they are forgiven, they are at peace with Jesus, but still uncertain about the future.

The second point is possibly even more profound than the first:

Through a deep belief in Jesus, not just an intellectual acknowledgement of him, but a belief that leads to a relationship with him, our world shifts to a new a vital reality. Jesus is alive, Jesus is MY Lord, Jesus is MY God, Jesus is the one through whom peace comes to reign in our souls.

This is the point and purpose of the whole of John's gospel and where he has been leading us. For at the end of our reading today, verses 30 and 31, he writes that the purpose of his Gospel is that the reader “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

The word ‘belief’ comes up repeatedly throughout this section. Thomas would not believe unless he saw and touched for himself. It is the close encounter with Jesus that has changed Thomas’ belief and brought him life. We see the apostles moving from uncertainty to certainty in Christ. They may still be in that closed room at the end of the reading, but everything has changed for them.

We find ourselves in times of uncertainty, but this passage, along with others, means that we know what is certain: Jesus is alive, He is OUR Lord, and He is OUR God.

Do you believe this for yourself, do you trust Him?

John is very clear, by believing in Jesus and all that he stands for, placing our lives in his hands, we may have life in his name.

If today, you see this clearly for the first time, then it is a wonderful opportunity to give him your life today, handing over to him all that you are and all that you could be. It is an offering worthy of our loving God. You will not be short-changed in the exchange, for his gift is eternal life and peace as His beloved son or daughter.

If you have already trusted the living Lord with your life and death, then this passage is a wonderful reminder that we don’t need to be in a particular physical place to encounter our Lord. Our faith in him deepens every time we spend time listening to Him through his scriptures, through prayer, through every time we step out in faith into this world, every time we trust that He walks with us and loves us and is with us in this troubled world. We can meet with our Lord Jesus today in any place, even in isolation and behind locked doors.

For the Lord Jesus’ peace is never bound by manmade walls.

Amen