**Sermon – Sunday 11th April 2021 – Easter 2**

**May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

If we cast our minds back to the summer of 2012 and the London Olympics, one of the stand-out days was what became known as “Super Saturday” when Jessica Ennis-Hill, Greg Rutherford and Mo Farah all won gold medals within the space of about 1 hour in the evening session.

I think the Olympic Stadium held approx. 80,000 people who obviously celebrated these achievements and I can remember one of the TV commentators saying that is years to come hundreds of thousands of people will claim that “they were there” on that magical evening.

To claim that they, too, had enjoyed that wonderful experience of watching the sporting achievements and some reflective glory of being part of the crowd that cheered the athletes on to their wonderful gold medals.

“I was there” or “I wasn’t there”.

To be part of something and to be able to relay first-hand what had happened or to have enjoyed the spectacle of a momentous event or to fail to understand as you weren’t at the event.

Sometimes the opposite statement “But you weren’t there” when we are seeking to explain what had happened or why something was done that maybe now does not look to be the right decision and our critics are debating the action that we took.

Or “You had to be there” to understand the impact of something or to see the funny side of an event which when recounted in the cold light of day doesn’t seem to be that funny.

I expect we can all relate to any of these scenarios and situations either as the person who was there or who was not there and trying to understand the event being recounted.

I was reminded of this when looking at our Gospel reading this morning that recalls the encounter between Jesus and Thomas and the other disciples in the Upper Room, shortly after the resurrection.

Hopefully it is a familiar story and is the source of the phrase “Doubting Thomas” which is often used when someone doubts something that turns out to be true or obvious to those around them.

However as I have said on many occasions, Thomas receives a bad press through this encounter as he actually doesn’t do anything that the other disciples hadn’t done previously until they, too, had met with the risen Lord.

And this can be a reminder to all of us to remember what we were like before we came to faith and a belief and trust in our risen Lord.

Too often once someone has qualified or passed a particular exam or qualification, we can forget what it was like before we were allowed to do something or carry out a particular task.

The most familiar is when learning to drive and motorists, who often get impatient with learners driving erratically or slowly in front of them, are reminded that we were all learners once and to remember what it was like.

The same is true of our Christian journey and for some of us our journey to faith may have be fraught and full of challenges before we may have had a Damascus Road moment and realised who Jesus is and placed our faith and trust in him.

Or it may have been a slow burn and a gradual realisation of the truth and power of the Gospel message.

For Thomas, who had been with Jesus these past three years, there was the realisation when he saw the risen Christ in the room that he had indeed risen from the dead and what the other disciples had been saying was true.

He reigns back on his desire to place his hand into his side and proclaims Jesus as his Lord and his God.

This encounter also tells us something about the appearance of the risen Lord in so far as his appearance would have convinced Thomas that he was indeed Jesus and not some imposter as otherwise he undoubtedly would have followed through with his plan to place his hand into his side.

Again this is further proof of the resurrection and as we say during the prayer of Committal at funerals:-

*“in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our frail bodies that they may be conformed to his glorious body, who died, was buried, and rose again for us..”*

Jesus chides Thomas for his lack of faith and looks to the future where people will come to faith without seeing the physical presence of Jesus.

We know from the Gospels and other New Testament writings that the risen Lord appeared to a number of people in different places before he ascended back to his Father 40 days after the resurrection – the day we now celebrate as Ascension Day – 13th May this year.

As we then read in the Acts of the Apostles the disciples awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and founded what we now know as the Church and set out fulfilling Christ’s command to go and make disciples everywhere.

Thomas is closed associated with taking the Gospel to India, where it is believed he was martyred in 72 AD.

Indeed our first reading reminds us of the early Christian community – how they shared everything and everyone had enough for their needs – a template for how we should live today.

The story of Thomas and his encounter with the risen Lord also has another powerful message to each one of us and those we seek to reach out and minister to.

As we heard Thomas was not present with the other disciples when the Lord initially appeared to them in the upper room and they believed that he had risen from the dead as the women had originally said on that first Easter morning.

Now it could have been that he was then denied the opportunity to meet with the risen Christ, but no Jesus reached out to him and specifically challenged him as to whether or not he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Sometimes in our lives we can feel that the opportunity has passed and that we have missed the boat.

Maybe a decision to take a particular job, study a particular subject at university or college, to marry a particular person, and the opportunity does not present itself again.

This is not the case with the decision as to whether or not to become a Christian.

If you read the biographies of many well-known Christians, whether within or outside the Church, a common theme is often that at their first encounter with the Gospel, they did not respond and it was only at a later date that they came to understand the invitation that was given to place their trust in God and his son Jesus Christ.

I expect if I asked each of you to recount your own Christian story, there would be a number of different experiences as to how people came to faith and no two stories are the same as each of our relationships with God are individual.

Indeed in the Gospels there are stories of Jesus encountering many people and we do not know what happened after the encounter and whether or not they came to faith – the rich man for example – we do not know if he did sell all his possessions and followed Jesus.

Therefore each of us has the reassurance that if we have not yet made a commitment to Christ, it is not too late – we can respond to the invitation at any point in our lives and Jesus will reach out to us just as he reached out to Thomas.

Equally each of us has the responsibility to show to those around us the life that faith in Jesus can bring.

The disciples met with the risen Lord and now, some 2,000 years later people will seek to see Christ in each of us – those who believe.

Our lives should reflect Christ like values and behaviours so that people can tell that we are Christians by what we say and what we do.

I mentioned earlier the reading from Acts that speaks of the new communities that were established by the first Christians and how radically different they were to what was going on around them – the pooling of resources, the distribution of monies to those in need.

A radical way of living and a model for Christian communities and dare I say it Churches to act.

Christians are called to be in the world and not to be conformed to the world and to take the Gospel message out into the places where it is needed and to show people the power of God’s love as we reach out.

During this pandemic there have been many examples of Christians serving their local community and people coming to faith as a result of their encounters with the Church and those who are now Christ’s representatives here on earth.

As we continue to take the Gospel message out into the world at this challenging time, may we be empowered by the risen Lord and be able to join in the words of Thomas as we proclaim:

“My Lord and my God!”

**Amen.**