

Second Sunday of Easter, 19th April

Collect: Risen Christ, for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred: open the doors of our hearts, that we may seek the good of others and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace, to the praise of God the Father. Amen

Acts 10.34–43 Then Peter began to speak to them: ‘I truly understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced:³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree;⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear,⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’

Gospel John:19-31 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.²¹ Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.²⁵ So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’²⁸ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’²⁹ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection

On Easter Day we had the passage from John's Gospel in which Mary Magdalene meets with Jesus early in the morning in the garden. Jesus saying to her "Do not hold on to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father."

Mary then goes and announces the good news to the disciples that Jesus is risen from the dead. The passage today continues in the evening of Easter Day when for this Gospel writer the disciples receive the Holy Spirit, breathed into them.

It is the completion of the new way of relating to Jesus that the followers will now live with. Not the clinging or holding on to the ways of the past but now for them to be Jesus' body, his hands and feet on earth continuing his way, living and showing by their actions his love poured out for all.

This is further confirmed when Jesus invites Thomas to touch his wounds which does contrasts with Jesus' earlier words to Mary. Touching the suffering, being alongside those in pain and putting aside fears and prejudices about other people to be a way in which the followers will show Jesus' love.

Those at the frontline especially in the hospitals and care homes are reaching out to those most affected by the virus and many doing this at risk to their own welfare. It continues to be important that the rest of us support them by our practices of social isolation and that those in government do all that is possible to ensure those at the frontline have the resources they need including for their own protection.

Each of the four gospel writers place an emphasis on the last days that Jesus spent with his followers before his crucifixion. In a very open and inclusive way he washes their feet and asks them to do the same to others. He shares with them the bread and the wine within a Passover meal and in this last supper asks of them to never forget the sacrifice he makes to bring people back to God.

We find however that after his death that the followers are confined, meeting in locked rooms. As we are needing to do at the present time they spend most of their time in a form of social isolation. Their fear was of arrest, our fear being of the virus and its consequences and of its spreading.

From their time in isolation comes a recognition of new ways of living, of handling fear and of being ready to be more open, being kinder and more compassionate. The risen life of Jesus coming to be found in the ways that this mixed group of people lived as he had lived, shared everything that they had and even in the most difficult of situations believing that his spirit was always within them and amongst them.

These words reflecting on Jesus death and on the resurrection are by Clare Richards:

Christ not crushed by death but living on in love too deep for crushing.

Christ not crushed by death but living on in love too great for slaying.

Christ not crushed by death but living on in love too strong for killing.