

The Second Sunday of Easter

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.

Psalm 133:

- ¹ Behold how good and pleasant it is to dwell together in unity.
- ² It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard,
- ³ Even on Aaron's beard, running down upon the collar of his clothing.
- ⁴ It is like the dew of Hermon running down upon the hills of Zion.
- ⁵ For there the Lord has promised his blessing: even life for evermore.

Acts 4.32–35: Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ³³ With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. ³⁵ They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Gospel John 20.19–end: 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:

Being part of a crowd has been difficult this last year. Considering how best to celebrate Easter this year needed careful planning so that we could safely gather. Crowds have recently been coming together in vigils for the loss of life and to protest. These also have been difficult to organise and to manage and control safely.

It was a crowd of the people who welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. A crowd made up of adults and children who warmed to Jesus, his teaching, his acceptance of all and his compassion for those who particularly the religious leaders ignored or condemned. Amongst these being the poor, children, widows, the injured and those bruised by life who made up the crowd welcoming Jesus, courageous in showing him their support.

And the covering of the road with palm branches a recognition of Jesus coming to save the people, a man of peace, whose agenda was the well-being and good of other people, for them to have fulness of life.

In another part of Jerusalem there would have been another procession that day. One taking place with a pre-organised crowd to salute and cheer Pontius Pilate, the representative of Roman rule as he entered the city. We see such processions as this today, especially where there is military rule. Processions to demonstrate power, to install fear in a crowd that is contained, controlled and confined.

It seems most likely that it was some of those from this crowd, welcoming Pontius Pilate, who were later those whipped up in a frenzy to call for Jesus to be crucified, and the murderer Barabbas to be released. First century riot tourists. I am never convinced that this crowd were the same people who had so warmed to Jesus days earlier, who had grasped who he was and celebrated his presence amongst them.

Rather, the plan for Jesus to be killed came from those who were threatened by him, who had concluded that it was “better for one man to die than for the whole nation to perish”, and being determined to have him killed, had lent support to Pilate seeking to have further leverage on him to issue a sentence of death.

Jesus had spoken of being raised up on the cross, not as a sign of trumping or triumphing over the religious leaders and the political leaders aligned with them, but because he had come to understand that God’s love would come through the laying down of his life and that the people would find him again as living with them and abiding in them.

On Easter Day the writer of John’s Gospel shows Mary Magdalene to be the first to comprehend this. There is no crowd for this encounter in the garden when Mary hears her name called and recognises it as the voice of Jesus.

Jesus who died alone on the cross, but who from the cross had recognised those he knew and who he asked to build up together a bond of mutual care and service, to live kindly and lovingly. We then find Mary Magdalene, one of those present at the Cross, leaving the garden on that first day of the week having found a new freedom and a joyful hope. She then goes to tell others, including Peter who had denied knowing Jesus and those other friends who had fled. Her experience of reconciling love overflowing from that encounter is now passed on to a small group of fearful others, and then from them to others and so the good news would spread. And it has continued to spread, reaching out to, and including each of us.

This way of spreading the good news captured well in the words of the hymn by Graham Kendrick “One Shall Tell Another.”

We cannot gather in great crowds today, but we do not need to be in one to journey with Jesus, journeying his way, being met by him in worship.

Like Mary we are invited to respond ourselves and to live that love wherever we are and however we can. And when we can be part of a bigger gathering, we can do so, as we do today by identifying more fully with that vibrant and diverse crowd who had come out to welcome Jesus, honestly, humbly with patient and joyful hope.