

Low (Virtual!) Sunday

19th April 2020 Covid-19 Lockdown

Readings

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Reflection – Encountering Christ in Lockdown

“We have seen the Lord” the disciples exclaimed.

But Thomas wasn't there. He didn't *feel* the presence of Jesus, he didn't *catch* the collective gasp of the fearing disciples, he didn't *hear* the familiar voice and words of Jesus: *“Peace be with you”*

Have you ever wondered why? Was the pain of grief and loss so deep he couldn't bear the paralysis of lockdown? Did he just have to do something, regardless of the risk to his own life? (How many of our essential service workers, among others, resonate with this today?)

Have you ever wondered *where* Thomas was on that first resurrection night when his brothers were locked away for fear of the Jews? Had the bereft disciple gone out under the cover of darkness, searching the shadows for a glimpse of the One he loved – the One whom Mary claimed she had seen that morning?

Have you ever wondered how he felt? Poor Thomas has always been labelled ‘the doubter’. But wasn't *he* the one willing to return to Jerusalem with Jesus and risk death after Lazarus died? *“Let us also go, that we may die with him”* he had said to his fellow disciples.

And wasn't it Thomas who said *“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”*ⁱⁱⁱ when Jesus spoke of preparing a place in his Father's house?

Is it possible that dear, impetuous Thomas was an ‘all or nothing’ sort of guy, a high-feeling type, deeply loyal....and highly sensate!

No wonder his reaction on hearing that Jesus had appeared to the others, even in lockdown, even showing them his wounds.

How utterly dejected and overlooked Thomas must have felt, missing such an intimate and miraculous encounter. How could he dare to believe? Was he terrified of the disappointment of experiencing his overwhelming grief all over again? Yet, not believing was even more unbearable. No wonder he retorted as he did: “unless I see the mark of the nails and my *hand* in his side, I will not believe.”

And so it was, that a week later (which must have felt like forever), Jesus met Thomas in *exactly the way* he needed to be met. Jesus knows and understands the power of experience. And so, he not only presented his wounds to Thomas, he invited Thomas *into* his wounds – his wounds of crucifixion: “*put* your finger here and *see* my hands. Reach out *your* hand and put it in my side.” Isn’t that about as intimate and sensate as you can get?

Remember, before Jesus’ death, Thomas had asked ‘the way’ and Jesus had responded – I am the way, the truth and the life. Now, a week after his resurrection, Jesus not only shows Thomas the Way but invites him into it – the way of the cross, the way of suffering that leads to resurrection life, the way of truth.

Jesus meets Thomas just where he is – not via Zoom, not livestreamed, Facebooked or YouTubed. Jesus meets Thomas in his hunger for personal encounter, his hunger for relationship. Jesus returned to lovingly gather Thomas to himself. And Thomas’s response was immediate and powerful: “My Lord and my God!” Through Thomas’s personal, authentic encounter with the risen Jesus, he was able to truly *know*, *experience* and *proclaim* God.

Resurrection doesn’t come as we expect. Resurrection comes amid tears in locked rooms, to people face-first with death. In our own times of loss and grief, we may

believe God is with us, that resurrection is true. But we may not feel it. If you're afraid or grieving, listen to the good news. You are not alone. That's how the first Easter was too. Jesus will come to you as you are.

Like Thomas, speak your truth. Pray your need for first-hand experience, for touch.

Name what gets in the way. Imagine what more Thomas and the others said together in that locked room. Like them, be willing to express and be specific about your grief, your loss, or your limitation to belief.

Whether - like Mary, the disciples or Thomas - we feel locked in, disabled and wounded by grief, or anger, doubt or despair, the God-who-is-closer-than-our- breath is ready to meet us and to invite each of us to reach deeply into *his* woundedness, and there, find healing for *our* woundedness.

And the words on Jesus' lips? "*Peace be with you*" – not once but three times:

"Peace be with you"

The peace, forgiveness, woundedness *and* healing love of the risen Christ is the gift we both receive and proclaim at Easter.

Even in lockdown!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Helen Roud

ⁱ John 11:16

ⁱⁱ John 14:5