

Easter 2 2021 - St Ninian's

What are we to make of these disciples? They have locked themselves away in a room; for fear of the Jews' - that is, the Jewish authorities. What is it that they fear? Is it a similar fate to that of Jesus, for being his followers and therefore guilty of sedition, insurrection? Are they frightened that someone will say that they stole the body in order to proclaim a resurrection that didn't happen? Or are they just, confused, ashamed, even terrified of the future without Jesus, afraid of their fear? John has already told us that the disciple whom Jesus loved had entered the tomb, seen the grave clothes and *believed*. What had he believed? What had he shared with the others? Mary Magdalene has seen and spoken with Jesus, taken the message to them 'I have seen the Lord'; the first apostle, the first to be sent. Are they full of wonder and joy? Do they remember that he had told them, more than once 'on the third day'? Or are they frightened of Jesus because they are so ashamed of abandoning him? They lock the door and hide, in fear.

And then he is there, standing amongst them. What do they expect - reprimand, recrimination, judgement? What they receive is 'peace'; such a familiar greeting - peace. He had

promised them peace during their last meal together - 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives.' (14.27). No wonder they rejoice - and a second time he gifts them peace, but this peace comes with a commission - 'as the Father has sent me, so I send you'.

For John, this day, this first day of the week, this first day of a new creation - is Pentecost; not like Luke's Pentecost with flames of fire and rushing wind. The Spirit comes quietly in the breath of Jesus - peace - and with the spirit comes authority - the responsibility to forgive or retain sins - not a responsibility they own individually, but one to be exercised collectively, in the power of the Spirit they have just received - a sharp reminder to anyone who thinks he/she can invoke God's support for personal judgement.

So what happens to the disciples after they receive not judgement but peace, not admonishment but commission? Well, it seems, not very much, because a week later, they are still in the house, cowering behind closed doors.

The beloved disciple has seen and believes, Mary Magdalene has seen, been appointed Apostle to the Apostles, and has delivered her message. Jesus has stood amongst them, gifted them peace,

breathed on them the Holy Spirit and commissioned them, and still, one week later, they are still in the house behind closed doors. But before we shake our heads in disbelief at the disciples' behaviour, let us think about ourselves. How many people come to church on Sunday, rejoice in the Lord, give him thanks, ask him to solve our problems - then go home and shut the door? - don't mix religion and politics, don't allow faith to interfere with economics (like an inaccurate tax return, or an inflated insurance claim), worship the creator but don't give a toss about his creation - all week, and then on the first day of the next week come back to worship God? As if the sacred and the secular are two different things, totally disconnected; faith, personal and private, behind locked doors.

And behind that locked door there is now one other person - Thomas; much maligned Thomas, and just as the disciples, it appears, did not trust the testimony of Mary Magdalene - 'I have seen the Lord' - Thomas does not trust the testimony of the others. he says he needs to see and to touch Jesus before he will believe - which seems perfectly reasonable to me - Jesus had, after all, shown the other disciples his wounds. Thomas wants no more than that which the others have already received. And

Jesus comes again, not just for Thomas but for all those gathered behind closed doors - and that includes us, every time we set aside our faith because it is inconvenient, embarrassing, socially awkward. The disciples have not deserved a second visit, but they get one anyway, and again are gifted peace. And Thomas is given that which he said he wanted, an opportunity to see and to touch. The point of the story is not 'did Thomas touch?' we are not told, the point is Jesus came - Jesus comes - Jesus offers himself, again and again, to those who seek him, giving the repeated gift of presence and peace, even to those who hide their faith behind closed doors.

It is not unusual to be afraid, to want assurance, reassurance, confirmation - it seems at times that it is impossible to live in the joy of the resurrection all of the time - doubt creeps in, despair takes hold, fear grabs us - 'what if', 'why', 'why not'.

There's that snake sliding through the grass, trying to lure us into denial, to get us to abandon the Lord. 'Unless - this, that, the other - I will not believe'. The disciples (that's us) live in fear even in the face of the Easter proclamation - Christ is risen - but Jesus comes anyway, and comes repeatedly, and even though they are tempted by fear and despair, the disciples do go - as

the Father sent me, so I send you. Do you think for one moment that they never felt fear, never doubted, never said take this cup from me? Of course they did, they were, we are, human beings, with needs and wants, but they knew, we know, that we are filled with an abundance of Spirit and grace. The disciples lock the door in fear and Jesus comes with peace and grace, and commission. 'I know you are afraid, but I will be with you'.

We have not seen, and, unlike Thomas, we cannot demand to see, but 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe'.

Time to unlock the doors, so that we can go out, seven days a week, and proclaim the Good News.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia.