

Easter 2 Year A

Family Service Address 2020

This week, I have seen a number of posts from Facebook friends that they have used their quarantine time, in these unprecedented times of COVID-19, to take up the art of bread-baking. I must admit, I am impressed. One is a friend from university, one is a school friend, another a mother of small children. I too have been participating in this trend, by watching old seasons of The Great British Baking Show. Some watching may remember my childrens address from Easter Day last year, for which I made use of bread dough as emblematic of the resurrection of Christ. When I asked the children what had caused Jesus' resurrection, hoping for an answer along the lines of "God's love", one of the children, hand raised and confident, answered, "yeast." Needless to say, that made my Easter Day, and this year, upskilled from all this talk of bread, I say to you confidently that it was not, in fact, yeast.

Jesus' tomb is open and empty but the disciples' house is closed and the doors locked tight. Jesus is not in the grave any longer, not bound by the grave-clothes any longer, and yet the disciples are bound in fear. Jesus, however, will not be stopped by locked doors. He comes right through those locked doors and appears in the midst of his frightened sheep. He comes to grant them peace. His greeting, "Peace be with you," is the Hebrew greeting "*shalom*,". More than simple tranquility, *Shalom* implies deep inner wellbeing, the kind of peace the world cannot give. And as Christ illuminates for us, this is the peace which passes all understanding.

They have all the doors locked and then Jesus comes to stand among them.

Then Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus (the twin), wasn't with them when Jesus came. We don't know why Thomas was absent, but we do know that he earlier thought that going to Bethany with Jesus would mean death for the disciples as well as Jesus. We know that this is also what the other disciples were afraid of, which led them to lock their doors.

The other disciples therefore said to Thomas, 'We have seen the Lord'. Their words to Thomas "We have seen the Lord" are essentially the same words "she had seen the Lord" that were used to describe Mary's encounter with Jesus. But Thomas says back 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."

Thomas' doubting is not only understandable, it is also important. Thomas voiced the doubts we all feel at times about the stories of the resurrection. Thomas only wanted to be sure that the Jesus he had walked alongside, ate with and been taught by, and the risen Jesus, were the same person. Thomas is more than just a doubter, however. He is determined not to believe. He is stubbornly saying, in effect, "The evidence has to be what I decide it has to be, or I will not believe." This is characteristic of Thomas. By deliberate, intentional choice Thomas rejects the evidence of witness. His trusted brothers and sisters tell him they have seen Jesus, they have touched him and felt him, but Thomas rejects the testimony of his friends, his companions, and refuses to believe until he

personally examines the evidence for himself. Thomas was not the sole doubter and will not remain a doubter.

At first, he does doubt the witness of the other disciples and so cannot believe the resurrection. However, once he sees what they have seen, he will manifest great faith.

So Jesus says, “Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side”. Jesus does not condemn Thomas for his failure to believe, but gives him that which enables him to believe. Thomas has demanded to see and touch the risen Lord, and Jesus allows him to do that. There is no indication that Thomas actually necessarily did touch Jesus’ wounds. Seeing the wounded, resurrected Christ is enough for Thomas.

“Don’t be unbelieving, but believing”. Jesus says. We think of this as the Doubting Thomas story, but Jesus’ words literally mean “unbelieving”. In this context, doubting isn’t as strong a word as unbelieving. Jesus recognises immediately that the faith Thomas once had, that Jesus is God, appeared to us in human flesh, has not merely been replaced with doubt, but totally disappeared in Thomas altogether.

“My Lord and my God!” In response, Thomas makes this great confession of faith. The greatest doubter has become the greatest believer. There comes flooding into the heart of this doubting disciple a realization of how foolish and stubborn he has been not to believe solid evidence. He confesses it immediately with his words. We know that there are several churches that trace their existence back to Thomas’ obedience to share the faith he had received. When he was convinced he also became a convincing element to all who would later doubt.

Jesus persists. As Christ came back a week later for Thomas, Jesus keeps coming back, being present to us, week after week among his gathered disciples, in the word, the water, in the bread and wine, so that none may miss the life and peace he gives. And he keeps breaking through the locked doors of our hearts to do so. And then, he sends us out of our safe, locked rooms, into a world that, like us, desperately needs his gift of peace, and “the outcome of ... faith, the salvation of the ... soul.”