

## Peace be with you

Sunday 19th April 2020 - Easter 2 - York Minster  
John 20: 19-31

*“Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book.” John 20:30*

Today, we meet Jesus in lockdown ... just like those first disciples did. Little time has passed since the resurrection, the disciples haven't had a week since celebrating Easter, just a few hours, and now they are terrified and locked together in a room. Some are beginning to believe that Jesus has risen but Thomas says "Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe." And then Jesus appears to "doubting Thomas."

The title "doubting Thomas" sounds as though it has an air of criticism about it, but I'm not sure that that it is wholly justifiable to criticise Thomas. What Thomas does here is to recognise his own needs. He needs physical evidence in order to believe and, far from pouring scorn on Thomas for his doubt as many have later come to do, Jesus meets him in his need. He does not try to change him but appears to Thomas physically in an encounter that will shape the whole of his future.

Is Thomas wrong to have this need for a physical encounter? I don't think so. Had the Gospel reading begun just a few verses earlier we would have seen Peter and the beloved disciple arriving at the tomb to look for Jesus. What makes them believe in the resurrection is apparently the way in which the cloths that had wrapped the body are lying on the floor, but the cloth that had covered his head was rolled up in a place by itself. Modern readers often miss the significance of this. Jesus was a tekton, often translated carpenter but probably more akin to a handiman. Those in his trade would have folded their work cloths in a very particular way and so for these two disciples that little glimpse of their friend in the way that he did things left them in no doubt that he had left the tomb and returned to the world.

If we had started the Gospel reading just a few verses before that, we would have read of Mary Magdalene's visit to the tomb. Later in her story we find her weeping in the garden and what brings her to believe that Jesus has risen is the sound of Jesus calling her name. Thomas, Peter, John, Mary ... all of them have their lives changed by an encounter with the risen Christ. But all of them are called differently according to their needs not according to a set formula.

Thomas's story is a reminder that different things affect different people. God changes different lives in different ways. Today you and I are in lockdown too, but even here, we are called to look for encounters with the risen Christ. Even now, God's voice is calling out to us both in what we see and in what we do and in what we hear. Just as we are, what you and I have to do is look out for the small ways in which God is calling out to us, meeting us in our needs as Jesus comes among us and says, 'Peace be with you.' And today, as we gather in our own locked room, the lips that Jesus will speak those words with, are yours.

Today, just like every day, people around the world are desperately longing to encounter the risen Christ just where they are, one who meets them in their needs and speaks peace to them. And in this locked



room Jesus says to you and to me, "... <sup>20</sup> *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*' <sup>22</sup> *When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*

In a few moments time, each of us will speak the words that Jesus did: "Peace be with you." That's because we know that we are called to be people who look for encounters with the risen Christ in every person and in every moment. Today, in lockdown, perhaps that's in medics, and delivery drivers, and our armed forces, and our politicians, and even in our own families.

John wrote that, "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book." So as you continue to look for those signs of the risen Christ, meeting you in your needs and calling you to do the same for others, may peace be with you.

Amen.