

Easter 2

27.04.2014

Acts 2:14a, 22-32; 1Peter 1:1-12; John 20:19-31

We are sent, that others may also believe.

Let me ask, how many here are called Thomas or Tom. Readings like the one we have heard today in our Gospel, do not do a kindness to those called Tom, do they. But I would like to suggest that the saying 'doubting Thomas' is not fair to all those Toms and Thomas' or in fact to the Thomas we see in the gospel. Robert showed me a cartoon yesterday which reflects the 'unfair treatment' Thomas receives. The cartoon shows two people having a conversation and one of them, a Thomas, is making the point, you don't see people talking about 'denying Peter' or 'run away naked Mark', so why do they all talk about 'doubting Thomas'. So, let us look at this man Thomas. We first meet him in John's gospel around the death of Lazarus. Jesus has indicated that he would like to go back to Judea again and the disciples have indicated this is not a good idea because the Jews are trying to find a reason or opportunity to stone him. When Jesus tells them that Lazarus has died, Thomas says 'let us also go, that we may die with him'. Then, later in John's gospel, at the beginning of Jesus' farewell discourses, Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to prepare a place for them, and that they know where he is going. Once again we hear from Thomas, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, how we can know the way?' Then, in today's gospel, because Thomas was not with the

disciples when Jesus appeared to them the first time, when he states he wants to 'see it for himself', we make disparaging comments about him. But let's look at what happened when Jesus appeared to the disciples the first time. Jesus suddenly appears to them, while they are locked in the room, and he immediately shows them his hands. The disciples don't ask to see, but they are shown. Thomas is not indicating any lack of belief, simply indicating that he would like to see Jesus for himself, he simply wants what the disciples have already had, a personal encounter with the risen Jesus. And when he does, he makes the statement which is the highest Christological statement of anyone in the gospels, a statement of trust and relationship; 'My Lord and My God'.

But I would also like to look at another section of today's gospel. After Jesus appears to the disciples the first time, he 'sends them', to continue his mission of revealing God to the world. They are given the Holy Spirit, to help them and then Jesus tells them they are to have the power to forgive, or to retain 'sin'. But, for John, 'sin' is not used in the same way as we think or speak of sin today. For John, sin is 'unbelief', and so the disciples are not being given power to decide whose sins will or will not be forgiven, but Jesus is telling them, explaining for them what it means to 'be sent', to make known the love of God that Jesus himself has made known. As the disciples continue Jesus' mission of sharing the love of God with those they meet, and people come to know and abide in Jesus, they will be 'released' from their unbelief, their 'sin'. But if

the disciples fail to bear witness, people will remain in their unbelief, and their 'unbelief', their 'sin' will be retained. When Jesus enters the room the second time, and after Thomas has made his Christological statement, Jesus adds to his message about the importance of the disciples continuing his mission. He tells Thomas, 'blessed are those who believe, but do not see'. The people to whom the disciples are being sent, will not have the benefit of 'seeing' Jesus, yet, because of the message the disciples take with them, they will come to believe, their 'unbelief' will be released. In fact John gives us the reason he has written his gospel, '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'.

Peter, in our first reading affirms that Jesus was freed from death by God. Death in all its forms, physical, emotional, existential, and communal, cannot defeat Christ, or us. And he concludes this passage by reminding us that we, with him, are witnesses to this resurrection. And this resurrection is also celebrated in our second reading, we are given new birth, new life, new hope.

Most of us would probably admit to loving the Easter season, it is full of rich text and the wonderful message of the gift of eternal life. But does all this really take away our doubts, our fears? Are we really able to live a life where all our fears and doubts are dispelled and we live in perpetual joy and positivity? No, I don't think so. Even the disciples, for all they saw, were still 'stuck in the

closed room' one week after the first encounter with the risen Jesus. They were not just waiting for Jesus to show up to prove to Thomas that he had risen, they were still stuck, still afraid, not sure if it was yet safe to leave their isolation and go out into the world and risk meeting those 'Jews' from whom they were hiding. The promise, the good news in today's gospel is that Jesus cannot be stopped. Locked doors did not stop him from appearing to his disciples, he came to them in the middle of their fear, their confusion, their doubt. He came offering peace and breathed the Holy Spirit into them, and then a week later, when they were still there, he came again, meeting Thomas this time. Jesus keeps coming back, no matter how many times we lock ourselves inside our safe little rooms, Jesus will still come and meet us, he still comes to give us peace, give us the gift of life.

The message from John, found at the end of his gospel is both curious and liberating. 'Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book', in other words, there is more to Jesus than can be found in the pages of scripture. This is good news, it reflects, it tells us, that Christ is alive and that his work cannot be contained in any book or creed. The same is true for all who are born of the Spirit, God's Spirit sets us free, breathes on us and empowers and enlivens us for all the adventures ahead of us in this life of ours. It invites us to breathe, inhale and exhale deeply of the Spirit. Apparently medical studies have shown that our stress can be reduced and our immune system enhanced by the simple act of 'breathing our prayers'.

When we breathe in God's Spirit, we become contemporaries with Jesus first followers; we can 'hear' Jesus say to us, 'receive the Holy Spirit'.

We have all received the gift of the Holy Spirit, we too have been commissioned to continue Jesus mission of revealing God to the world. We too have been given power to 'release' others from their 'unbelief'. Breathe; breathe in the Spirit, inhale and exhale the Spirit and let God live in and through you, let the Spirit free you from fear and doubt, allow God's peace to fill your life.

We don't believe in Jesus because he was raised from the dead. We believe he was raised from the dead because we believe in Jesus. The Gospel was written so we might believe and have life in his name. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

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