

Low Sunday 8th April 2018 ChCh-St. Luke's

Readings: Acts 4:32-35

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

Reflection:

It was a cold dreary day in October 2013. I was relishing a prayerful, afternoon tour of Durham Cathedral with the most experienced tour guide on their staff. The magnificent Romanesque architecture oozed with over ten centuries of history – the world's first structural pointed arch soaring high in the Nave, huge stone columns, stunning stained glass, the Shrine of St Cuthbert honouring the founder of the ancient monastic community who called this site home....and the western Galilee chapel housing the Tomb of the Venerable Bede. Then, at the east end, the Chapel of Nine Altars - a 13th century addition, built to accommodate pilgrims in medieval times as they queued to enter the Shrine of St Cuthbert. And it was in *this* space that we came to a contemporary sculpture – Christ crucified, the huge cross sprawled across the floor, the wounded Christ figure within hand's-reach.

As I stretched to touch the wounded hands and open side of the Christ, the guide told one of her favourite stories: A visiting school party were gathered around the cross this particular day and were invited to touch the Christ-figure's wounds. One little boy was brave enough to do so. "*And what's your name?*" asked the guide... "*Thomas*" he replied!!

We are created as sensate beings. Our personal experiences - of sight, sound, taste, smell and touch - feed and shape us. They inform us about our world, and our relationships. That is why Jesus spent three years with his disciples – rather than simply writing an instruction manual! That is why Mary – the one who poured fragrant ointment on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair (what could be more sensate than that?) came running from the empty tomb saying "*I have seen the Lord!*" We are created as sensate

beings. Our personal experiences feed and shape us. Perhaps that's why the disciples' *response* to Mary's excited announcement was pretty much a "yeah, right!"- because it wasn't their experience. *They* needed to see – empty tomb, folded grave clothes, their wounded, risen Lord.

And perhaps that's why Thomas's response to the excited disciples' very same words ("*We have seen the Lord*") was also pretty much a "yeah, right!"

Thomas wasn't present, 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*"; He didn't *see* the wounds on Jesus' hands and side.

Jesus knows and understands the power of experience. He understood this, as he encountered the grieving, struggling Thomas on his return visit to the house behind locked doors. "*Peace be with you*" he said. "*Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.*" (How intimate is that?!) "*Do not doubt, but believe.*"

Jesus met Thomas just where he was – in his hunger for personal encounter, his hunger for relationship. Jesus returned to gather Thomas to himself. And Thomas's response was immediate and powerful: "**My Lord and my God!**" Through Thomas's personal, authentic, sensate encounter with the risen Jesus, he was able to truly *know, experience* and *proclaim* God.

Death presents to the world a final door that is locked and sealed forever. The crucified-and-risen Christ has wrenched that door from its hinges, so that we may pass through it, as he did, into the heart of God.¹

In *our* faith journey, our unique, personal encounters with Our Lord – the Risen Christ - enliven and enrich us. How else would we – like Thomas - know and feel the healing love & forgiveness, grace & compassion of God.

¹ Resurrection Knowing – Br. Keith Nelson

When Jesus encountered the disciples in the locked room, he in turn, gave a real, sensate experience of his presence and power, as he breathed on them, saying: “*Receive the Holy Spirit*” Just as in the second chapter of Genesis God breathes the spirit of life into the first man ‘Adam’, and in Ezekiel, God breathes life-giving spirit into the dry bones of the house of Israel, so in John’s gospel, it is Jesus who now breathes the life-giving Spirit – the very power of God – onto the disciples.

The disciples - having been paralysed with fear and grief - are now, through encounter with Jesus, given the power and authority to do what God alone did – forgive the sins of others. I wonder how they felt – feeling the life-breath of God – being bathed in divine love and holy peace, empowered to continue Christ’s reconciling work in the world? As Walter Brueggemann states: *‘He gave them breath, but he also took their breath away’!*

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

And the Spirit, peace and power to forgive, is given to us – not only *for* ourselves, but so as to invite others into healing relationship. What an awesome responsibility – what a lifelong task – to carry God’s peace and reconciling love into the depth of our being – breathing it in with every breathe - and to breathe it out, into *our* relationships – with family, friends, neighbours, church family and community.

*“I believe in the resurrection of the body,” we intone boldly, scandalously, irrationally in our Creeds. The rhythmic praying of words worn smooth by repetition in church may diminish or attenuate the bold scandal, the verses running together as we leap over a chasm without looking down.”*²

² Our prayer becomes “we” – Br. Keith Nelson

The peace, forgiveness and healing love of the risen Christ is the gift we proclaim at Easter. It is His gift to us, for us to live and share with one another.

In the past week, a family approached one of our ministry units seeking an exorcism in their home. I – with a colleague – had the privilege of breathing the love and reconciling peace of Christ into that home. It was a very sensate experience – lighted candles, holy water liberally splashed, oil of anointing, spoken prayer, movement through the home – all enabled an anxious family of adults and children, to unlock the doors of home and hearts, and to feel and know the Light that dispels all darkness and the perfect Love that casts out fear.

Can we, like young Thomas in Durham cathedral, Thomas-the-twin behind locked doors, and an anxious family in Christchurch – courageously and honestly open ourselves to encounter Christ and *receive* His peace, and reconciling love?

With whom might *we* share Christ's peace, and reconciling love this week?

In the name of God.....

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!