



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: John 20:19-31

Background to the reading

Our reading this morning follows the story of Mary Magdalene who saw the resurrected Christ. The disciples were still mourning the death of Jesus inside a house, despite the fact that they previously heard about his resurrection. They were still in Jerusalem because the Feast of the Unleavened Bread was not over.

The Gospel of John says that they were locked inside because of fear for the Jewish authorities. John is setting the scene which we can easily imagine. They did not know what was going to happen next. They feared the knock on the door. They must have speculated a lot about all the things that happened. They did not have peace, that is for sure when the resurrected Jesus stood among them and offered them Peace.

Proper residences were equipped with bolts and locks. Bolted doors would prevent anyone from entering (a heavy bolt could be slid through rings attached to the door and its frame), unless one could walk through closed doors which Jesus did. "Peace be with you" was the standard Jewish greeting, but in this case Jesus gave them what they desperately needed and even more so – they were forgiven for not being faithful to Him till the end!

Then Jesus showed them his wounds. Wounds were sometimes shown as evidence in court; here their function is to identify that it is the same Jesus who died. In much of Jewish tradition, the dead would be resurrected in the same form in which they died before God healed them, so that everyone would recognize that the person who stood before them was the same one who had died. "Hands" includes one's

wrists, which was where the spikes would have been driven; a nail through the palm would not have secured the person in place on the cross, since the victim's weight would have ripped the hand open.

When they saw the signs on His resurrected body they were delighted with joy. Their grief was overshadowed by joy and their anxiety by His peace. Then Jesus gave them the authority to be witnesses of His resurrected body. He is sending them out in His name like God the Father has sent him. But He offers them His peace and presence through His Holy Spirit which He blows over them. They do not go alone. He gives them the authority to offer other people His peace, presence, forgiveness and hope.

In Jewish tradition prophets often appointed their successors. Judaism sometimes conceived of prophets as God's agents; the sender authorized agents with his authority to the extent that they accurately represented him. Jewish literature especially connected the Holy Spirit with the power to prophesy, or speak for God.

But Thomas also called the "Twin" or the "double" was not with them. He becomes their first opportunity to witness the resurrection of Jesus. But he is full of doubt. He says that if he does not see the marks on Jesus' resurrected body, he will not believe. And I can just imagine the reaction of the disciples. They saw the resurrected Jesus but one of them – Thomas - does not believe them. And nothing happens to prove the contrary. The feast would soon be over and they would leave for Galilee.

But a whole week passed before Jesus appeared again. This time Thomas is filled with awe because Jesus appeared inside the room although the doors are locked. Jesus addressed him alone as if He knew exactly what he previously said. Jesus also addressed his doubt namely to see for himself the wounds. And Jesus also said to him to stop doubting and believe, which he did. He confessed Jesus as God.

Then Jesus said that it will be better if people believe despite seeing signs!

Verse 31 is a summary of why everything happened the way it did. It happened so that everyone can have faith in Jesus Christ's resurrection. Nothing can separate the believer from God – not even death!

Sermon

³¹ But these are written that you may^a believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Our reading tells us about a remarkable scene. Jesus appears to His disciples and gives them authority by blowing His Holy Spirit on them to be witnesses of His resurrection. And then the first one they witness to is one of them who does not believe one word of their testimony that Jesus had risen from the tomb. It was Thomas who said that he would not believe any of it unless he saw for himself the marks of the crucifixion on Jesus.

In the end he became a witness too after he saw the wounds of Jesus. Jesus blew His Spirit on them and gave them the authority to convey the message of His resurrection to all people. And He expects you and me to do the same. And we have no excuse. HE said that we will be blessed when we believe without “seeing the marks of his resurrected body”.

But we are all different and our witnesses will be different, as long as we all confess the same truth that Jesus is our living hope. It does not matter who we are or if we are the doubtful Thomas, as long as we witness in truth about our faith and hope of the everlasting life.

In the end we all received the same message from both groups – the 10 disciples and the doubtful Thomas.

I guess we can compare it to the different interpretations from the commentators and through the different pictures of the recent royal wedding. Although all the stories were different they all tell the same story, the story of a commoner who married a prince.

The resurrection of Jesus does not have to be told only by ministers or elders. Each and everyone needs to be witnesses of the Hope that we received through the resurrection of Jesus.

But we are not alone. Jesus offered us peace with God. He gave us His Holy Spirit to help us to be truthful witnesses of His resurrected presence. And when we are anxious and full of doubt we can have the assurance – Jesus will also come to us too wherever we are. Yes He will come to us in the most unusual places:

- when we hide from others in a dark and closed room,
- when we are anxious and scared,
- when we are feeling hopeless and tired,
- when we are ill and suffering,
- when we worry about tomorrow,
- when we lose all our savings,
- when other people hurt us with their gossip and insensitivity
- when our loved ones die and we are left alone,
- when we cry and cannot stop crying,
- When we struggle to overcome alcohol or drug abuse,
- When we divorce and are left alone,
- When we cannot pray and sing praises to God!

You and I can go in peace this morning out of this church and rejoice because nothing can keep us away from the Triune God, the Father, the Son and His Holy Spirit. I want to conclude in the words of Paul:

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Amen!

^d Or *nor heavenly rulers*