

Easter Sunday

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: John 20:24-31 (NT page 1089-1090)

Reader: P Shiels

Jesus Appears to Thomas

24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

MP 708

To God be the glory!

Sermon

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The Gospel of John tells us about two appearances of Jesus - the first one being when the disciples, except Thomas, were all together in Jerusalem and the second where Thomas was present. Our reading is about the second appearance.

The disciples would remain inside the house to mourn the death of Jesus. It is only later that we hear that Thomas was not with them. But the disciples at this point of the story were still gripped with fear. They were still terrified that security forces would find them. After all, their enemies found Jesus at night and came after him with torches and weapons. No wonder the doors were locked in both instances.

At the first appearance everyone was still celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread which meant that none of them would have left Jerusalem for Galilee yet. Proper residences were equipped with bolts and locks. Bolted doors would prevent anyone from entering, unless one could walk through closed doors like Jesus did. In both appearances the doors were locked. Jesus' appearance in the locked room suggests a resurrection body from divine nature. On both occasions Jesus greeted them with the standard Jewish greeting: "Peace be with you". And at both appearances He showed them the signs of his crucifixion.

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.

But Thomas, the other disciple doubted because he was not present at the first appearance. He did not believe the disciples' collection of Jesus' first appearance.

So a week later when they were all together again, Jesus appeared for a second time, this time challenging Thomas' doubts. The feast was over and the disciples would thus soon be ready to return to Galilee unless they received orders to the contrary. Jesus appeared again through a locked door and it seems as if He heard exactly what Thomas said previously.

So He invites Thomas to touch His wounds. Thomas was now convinced that it was really Jesus so he confessed: "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus said something that is very realistic to us namely: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus was talking to you and me. We are indeed blessed when we believe without seeing Him or His wounds....

Jesus is turning the tables upside down again because humanly speaking , we all are programmed to follow the rule: Seeing is believing!

People in our day struggle more and more to believe in a God because of all the atrocities in the world. More and more people are shouting out: If there is a God, why this and why that?

I came across an amazing video clip on YOU TUBE which I can unfortunately not show you due to a lack of facilities like broadband and internet in this building. But hopefully when I tell you it will still carry the same impact.

A man went to a dentist in Australia. The dentist inspected his mouth and said that he had no cavities. The man responded by saying "Thank God for that". The dentist then said: "God" as if he could not believe that someone can even mention God's name. "Who can still believe in this age in a God?" The man answered "I do". The dentist said: Obviously you have not noticed, the poverty, destruction, wars, everything that is wrong in this world".

The man said: Well I do not believe in dentists. Think about it. If there were dentists, why is there so many people walking about with broken, infected and missing teeth. The dentist then said: "I cannot help that people are reluctant to come to the dentist to get their teeth looked after".

The man then said: Well exactly. It is also true of God. He cannot help it when people do not come to Him and choose to follow their own ways.

But Jesus said: Blessed are those who believe despite all the atrocities. Blessed are those who believe because they "have seen what the Lord are doing in the world, doing right now". God's Spirit can never be kept on a leash. God is always ahead, doing small and large things – performing miracles of kindness and love, encouraging people to do acts of kindness, to walk the extra mile.

Last night Nanda read to me Psalm 102 and I must say as I was listening to the words of the Psalmist I could not help to think that the Psalmist is also on a journey from doubt to faith, something that I am sure we can all relate to.

The Psalmist says:

Psalm 102

A prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament before the Lord.

- 1 Hear my prayer, O Lord;
let my cry for help come to you.
- 2 Do not hide your face from me
when I am in distress.
Turn your ear to me;
when I call, answer me quickly.
- 3 For my days vanish like smoke;
my bones burn like glowing embers.

4 My heart is blighted and withered like grass;
I forget to eat my food.
5 Because of my loud groaning
I am reduced to skin and bones.
6 I am like a desert owl,
like an owl among the ruins.
7 I lie awake; I have become
like a bird alone on a roof.
8 All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who rail against me use my name as a curse.
9 For I eat ashes as my food
and mingle my drink with tears
10 because of your great wrath,
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.
11 My days are like the evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.
12 But you, O Lord, sit enthroned forever;
your renown endures through all generations.
13 You will arise and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to show favor to her;
the appointed time has come.
14 For her stones are dear to your servants;
her very dust moves them to pity.
15 The nations will fear the name of the Lord,
all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.
16 For the Lord will rebuild Zion
and appear in his glory.
17 He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;
he will not despise their plea.
18 Let this be written for a future generation,
that a people not yet created may praise the Lord:
19 "The Lord looked down from his sanctuary on high,
from heaven he viewed the earth,
20 to hear the groans of the prisoners
and release those condemned to death."
21 So the name of the Lord will be declared in Zion
and his praise in Jerusalem
22 when the peoples and the kingdoms
assemble to worship the Lord.
23 In the course of my life he broke my
strength;
he cut short my days.
24 So I said:

“Do not take me away, O my God, in the midst of my days;
your years go on through all generations.

25 In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

26 They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
Like clothing you will change them
and they will be discarded.

27 But you remain the same,
and your years will never end.

28 The children of your servants will live in your presence;
their descendants will be established before you.”

This is indeed a Psalm of hope that we can sing today. The Lord God has given us all the new hope of a new kingdom expressed by this Psalm. We are no longer like owls in a desert. No we are birds, free to fly wherever God’s Spirit is leading us. Why? Because Jesus has risen from the dead. We are no longer people without hope or a future.

May we go out and tell the world that the Lord is risen. We have the sure and certain hope of a new future to be with God in all eternity. And maybe seeing is not believing!

Amen