

2nd Sunday of Easter 7th April 2024

Psalm 133 Acts 4:32-35 1 John 1-2:2 John 20:19 – 31

Last week Stuart shared Mark's account of Resurrection Day. He talked about the women who were the first to find out that the tomb where Jesus had been laid was empty. It left them bewildered, afraid and wondering what had happened. They had not anticipated this. Their whole world had been turned upside down and they had no clear understanding then as to what had happened. Only a message from the young man in white telling them that Jesus had risen from the dead and they were to tell the disciples, **and Peter**, that Jesus would go ahead of them to meet them all in Galilee.

Today our Gospel reading is from John's account, so we have more details. We learn that Mary Magdalene, weeping, mistakes Jesus for the gardener. I wonder what degree of compassion and depth of feeling was conveyed when he simply replied to her question by saying her name - 'Mary.' She immediately recognized him. She knew Jesus was talking, in the flesh, with her. I wonder what thoughts and feelings arose hearing his voice. It must have raised questions in her mind but even more so, **hope**. Did it trigger for her a faint or growing reminder that Jesus had said he was to die but that he would live again. We may never know but we do know she told the disciples she had seen Jesus. Despite that, or because she was a woman and, in those days, and that culture, women were not thought to be reliable witnesses, the disciples were nervously meeting behind locked doors. They were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Peter had already been identified as one who had been with Jesus and had denied

knowing Jesus three times but all, except perhaps John, had deserted Jesus in his hour of greatest need. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them. They were filled with joy. Sadly, Thomas wasn't with them and wasn't willing to believe they truly had seen the risen Jesus. A week later, still hiding behind a locked door, but this time with Thomas, Jesus appeared again. With Mary, he just said his name and she knew him. With the disciples, both times, he greeted them with **'Peace be with you.'** Thomas gets a bad name sometimes for being a doubter, but I wonder if we would all have wanted proof too. This was absolutely new territory for them all. Jesus died, was buried in the tomb but was now living among them, in the flesh again. He wasn't a ghost or an apparition of any sort. He was real even though he was able to appear in a locked room in his renewed physical body. They knew it. I love the response Thomas gives Jesus when Jesus invites him to put his finger in his wounds or his hand into the wound in his side. When challenged to believe, Thomas exclaims 'My Lord and my God.' Mary responded to Jesus as her much-loved teacher. The disciples to him as their leader and friend. Thomas recognized that Jesus truly was God.

How do we see Jesus?

Jesus was willing to meet Mary, Thomas, the disciples, later Peter, the men on the road to Emmaus at their point of need and in the way which would most deeply help them. I am sure he does the same for each of us.

Jesus also speaks to people collectively. Many times, in Scripture, his first words were 'Do not be afraid.'

Here, both times he appeared among them in the locked room, he chose to say, 'Peace be with you'.

With the help of my reading, I'd like to unpack this meaning of peace more. ¹

"Peace be with you." What exactly is Jesus offering here? It was a standard Jewish greeting and as such may have been deeply meaningful or the same as us saying 'hello, how are you' to our friends. Jesus had risen from the dead so had ushered in the new kingdom rule by overcoming death. The new creation purposes were at play. With that in mind, I believe this is a deeper meaning of peace. In Isaiah 9:7 the Messiah is called the Prince of Peace. 'This is not just an inner peace of heart for every individual who hears and believes. It's not just an agenda for peace for a warring world. This is using the Hebrew word SHALOM to speak of a deep quality of life which includes but transcends both the above. It is the means for rich and fruitful human living, of God's new creation bursting forth as a many-coloured flower.

Jesus showed his hands and side, the marks of the love which had loved them to the uttermost. They were proof of his words on the cross 'It is finished' which includes the fact that the price of our sin has been paid in full. Our peace, never other than costly, has been purchased on the cross.

¹This paragraph and all that follows, owes much to NT Wright's comments including direct quotes put within quotes above. Twelve Months of Sundays, Reflections on Bible Readings, Year B, SPCK, ©2002 Pages 56-57. Extra notes from my New Living Translation Bible which is filament enabled.

When Jesus next said 'Peace be with you' to the disciples, he followed that by commissioning them to continue the work of the kingdom that he had begun. He then breathed the Holy Spirit on them and spoke of forgiveness. We will hear more about the Holy Spirit empowering them at Pentecost. The other readings for today spoke of areas that flow from God's work of peace in our hearts. Sharing within a sense of community, fellowshiping with other believers, living and walking in the light, being forgiving, living through the power of Jesus name, and, if we have checked out the psalm for today, Psalm 133, realizing that our living in unity and harmony is just as precious as the anointing oil that was poured on Aaron in the Old Testament. More than that, our unity and harmony as believers is where blessing, even life everlasting is pronounced.

Lastly, Philippians 4 speaks of a great exchange. We tell God our needs and concerns, thanking him for what he has done, and he gives us the 'peace that exceeds anything we can understand.' His peace will guard our hearts and minds as we follow Christ. As we let go our own, at times, selfish agendas, as we learn to die to our own wants while still giving our needs to God, as we let God transform us from one degree of glory to another' we are promised that the God of peace **will be with us**.

So, when we weekly pass the peace of God to one another, we are sharing our belief that this deep peace God offers, because of the cost Jesus paid on the cross, is being passed to each other as a meaningful blessing. Peace – wellbeing - be to you through Christ, and even more '**may the God of peace be with you.**' Let's not take this gift from Jesus lightly. He wants to bless us.