

**2020-04-19 Sue Diggory**

**Easter 2**

**John 20 verses 19 – 23**

On Thursday it was announced that we face at least another three weeks of Lockdown. I wonder how that announcement, even though it was what we were expecting made you feel? Frustrated, angry, disappointed, relieved or perhaps even a little fearful.

These emotions were I suspect shared by the disciples on the evening of Easter day as they clung to each other in a locked room. That is of course what we do when we are fearful, we cling to those we love and trust, as we wait for the fear to pass, and for many of us that is what we are doing now, clinging to those we love and trust, not perhaps in the way we usually to with physical hugs of comfort, but via the telephone, email or the wonders of social media, as many of us have had to learn new tricks whether or not we are old dogs!

Our Gospel reading, in many ways reflects where we are today, as the disciples gathered together for safety in that locked room on the evening of Easter Day. What a day it had been; firstly there was the desire by the women to complete the burial rituals in accordance with Jewish custom, then the shock for them of discovering the open and empty tomb, and finally Mary's encounter with the risen Christ and his commission to her to '*go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee where they will see me*'

Yet instead of being filled with resurrection joy we find the disciples unsure of what the women told them, and filled with *fear of the Jews*. They had seen how the Religious Leaders had conspired to have Jesus put to death and now they must have been wondering how they would seek to deal with them, his known followers and disciples. What would they say if a loud knock come to their day on that Easter Day evening?

Suddenly things changed, not though a knock on the door but by the very walls of the room becoming permeable as the risen Christ appeared and stood in their presence. Suddenly sadness and fear turned to joy; suddenly they were overjoyed because he had come to them as he promised he would. *Peace be with you* – how must they have felt as they heard those words and saw Jesus standing there in the room with them. Relieved, overjoyed, sceptical – was it really him – then he showed them his scarred hands and his wounded side and the disciples rejoiced as the doubts trickled away; but were they ready for the message they were about to hear *as the father sent me I am sending you*.

Jesus was back! And Jesus was giving them a message and a task, a commission; they were being sent but not on their own and not in their own strength because Jesus not only spoke to them, but he breathed on them and said *receive the Holy Spirit* receive the breath that gives life, the breath that he offers to each one of us, his breath that brings life.

Let's press the pause button for a moment and reflect on what has happened, on the how and the why of the transformation that has just taken place in the lives of the disciples and ponder on what we might be able to take from it as we sit shut away in our homes today.

The door was locked, but that was no barrier to the risen Christ, he was and is able to move freely amongst us today. The disciples saw the visible and risen Christ standing in their presence, in the very room that they had retreated to *for fear of the Jews*. We may not be able like them to see the visible and risen Christ, for we are not only Easter people, we are also Pentecost people. We live the other side of the completion of the Easter story as both the Ascension and Pentecost have taken place, we may not be able to see the risen Christ, but we can experience his presence as the Holy Spirit moves amongst us, whether or not we have shut the door!

As we read on in our Gospel we encounter Thomas, who was not there when Jesus first appeared, and at this stage unable to join in the elation that the others were experiencing for himself. Thomas had to wait until he could see for himself. Maybe you are feeling a bit like Thomas, aware that others seem to find it easy to see Christ at work in their lives, that others seem to have the strength of faith you would like to have, but something that especially at this difficult time seems to elude you. I suggest that there are many more 'Thomas' around than we think, and that we all have our Thomas moments, I certainly do, be it for a few minutes, a few days or even a few months.

If we look back to the story we see that Jesus understood just what Thomas needed, not what Thomas thought he needed! *Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.* Here Thomas set out what he thought was needed to enable him to believe, yet when Jesus stood before him all he needed to do was simply be in his presence, as he found himself uttering *My Lord and my God*. Joy had been restored to all now including Thomas.

Today and everyday Jesus understands what we need, and not just what we think we need. Maybe as we sit behind our closed doors, we need to remember that walls are no barrier to the risen Christ and that even if we can't see him we can rest safe in the knowledge that he is there, in every room, in every home, longing to be welcomed into every heart.

I think the words of today's collect are ones that we should pray for ourselves and those we are clinging to, those we love and trust today.

Risen Christ,  
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:  
open the doors of our hearts,  
that we may seek the good of others  
and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace,  
to the praise of God the Father.

Rev Sue Diggory

