

**Easter 2**      19 April 2020

A sermon prepared for the parish of St Andrew Guernsey by the Rector, the Very Reverend Tim Barker, during the coronavirus 'lockdown'.

*Readings: Acts 2 vv 14a & 22-32 and John 20 vv 19-end*

Alleluia. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Thomas has had a bad press over the centuries. To describe him as 'doubting Thomas' does him a huge disservice. For reasons we will never know, Thomas was away from Jerusalem on that crucial Sunday evening. There is no record of him being at Golgotha, the place of the skull, Calvary, the place where Jesus was crucified between the two thieves. But we can't hold that against him, as the gospels give no indication that the majority of the disciples were there. At the foot of the cross, we find just Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the wife of Clopas – and John, the beloved disciple.

Today, although we are a week on from Easter Day, the gospel reading takes us first to the place where the disciples are gathered on Easter Day as they take stock of what has happened. They are thinking about the reports from the women, and the empty tomb, which some of them have seen for themselves. Jesus appears in their midst and speaks to them. It is difficult to imagine how they felt. John, as he recounts the experience of that evening, writes simply, 'The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.' Of course. But can we begin to imagine the other emotions that had rushed through them?

Thomas is not with them that evening. He must have kicked himself. Angry? Perhaps. Disappointed? Certainly. And so he does what humans do in such circumstances. A little modest posturing. Thomas is reluctant to embrace the significance of what the other disciples report to him – unless he can experience it for himself. But he clearly isn't going to miss out on the action. As Thomas gathers with the disciples a week later, he is initially sceptical – incredulous. And it has to be said that the other disciples were not bubbling with unrestrained joy: the doors were still shut. But when Jesus appears, Thomas' uncertainty disappears in an instant. He joins the other disciples in a shout of faith.

John ends his gospel narrative with the disciples, self-isolated, if not actually in lockdown. And yet the encounters he records are John's Pentecost moments. Jesus says to the disciples, 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' Jesus' words resonate around the room: 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Self-isolation and lockdown may be our experience at the moment, for good and obvious reasons. But the prevalence of modern technology means that we are engaging with people in ways that we have not previously imagined and tried. In lockdown, our doors, actual and virtual, are open in ways we could not have imagined just a few weeks ago. The Church is witnessing to Jesus in foodbanks and hospitals, providing support and reassurance by telephone and email, by standing at gravesides and in constant offerings of prayer.

The disciples were sent from their hiding place into the thick of the world, empowered to speak forgiveness of sins, to let the light of Jesus shine. The Acts of the Apostles, from which our readings come throughout this Easter season, is the story of what happens when Pentecost is lived, when the disciples escape the lockdown of fear, and when the gospel connects with people: 'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples,

which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.'

Alleluia. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.