

20200416-Low Sunday

I wonder if we might try to put ourselves in the place of the disciples who saw Jesus on that first Sunday evening, closed-up behind locked doors out of fear they would be attacked. If we amalgamate the various Gospel accounts I think we can be sure that they were very taken aback, indeed afraid, when Jesus first appeared. We know that he asked to be fed and accepted a piece of fish, making a point of eating it in front of them.

One imagines there was quite a crowd there, with Luke saying it was the eleven remaining apostles and those with them.

Jesus also had some things to say and revealed to them truths out of scripture; it was perhaps a mini bible study as well.

How would it have been to try to get to sleep that night after Jesus had gone away again and you all sat gawping at each other? All the hints that Jesus had dropped over those three years and now all the various scriptures that he had explained to you afresh, perhaps now started to make sense; certainly the two that had been on the road to Emmaus were there that evening, and they now had a sense of what it is that the scriptures 'from the Law and the Prophets' indicate about Jesus.

Looking at the sequence of events in Luke's Gospel, it seems that Jesus makes Himself know to Peter, then the two on the Emmaus Road and then

they go back to the disciples gathered together, who then collectively assent to the fact that Jesus 'has really risen'. But who has actually seen Him e by this point in the early evening? The women, Peter, the Emmaus pair and no one else; but all the gathered disciples accept he has risen.

And now lets imagine it's the Monday morning. How do you feel? One imagines you are fairly up-beat to put it mildly. Perhaps some of you go to the Temple to praise God; perhaps one or two go fishing for the evening meal. The company appears to be together and Peter is emerging as their leader; perhaps meals are being prepared together and they are starting to realise that the 'Breaking of Bread' will become a regular weekly memorial, after-all Jesus was recognised in precisely that way at Emmaus; it seems to be the way in which Christ's loving presence is brought into the fellowship; into our fellowship.

But of course Thomas was not there. Who knows where he was and perhaps that was part of the problem. Why was he not with everyone else? And yes there might have been a dental appointment or that Easter break he'd already paid for, for his wife and kids, but it is odd he's not there for a whole week. What else do we know about him? He was given to the grand gesture: 'Let's go with him and die with him', is his reaction in one of the Gospels when Jesus announces a plan - a bit theatrical, a bit fatalistic, somewhat out of touch with rigorous thinking, perhaps. It was Thomas don't forget who asked Jesus for the way to go, saying they couldn't possibly know the way; to which Jesus responded that He is the Way, Truth and Life. Again, Thomas seems to

have had a bit of the sceptic about him; something the Holy Spirit seems to have removed far from our own company.

But now it's about to get a whole lot worse for scepticism. Those gathered together accepted from Peter and the others who had seen Jesus on that first evening, that 'yes' it really had happened. Thomas, unless he had been on further extended holidays during Jesus' three years, would have seen three others raised from the dead: Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son and Lazarus. Furthermore he would have been witness to a deluge of healings and miracles and given that he was one of the 'sent-out' ones, he probably would have 'done' them himself.

It's now the second Sunday, indeed Low-Sunday, and Thomas has been greeted by some very enthusiastic fellow-disciples and apostles with the words, 'we have seen the Lord'. Of course several of them had 'seen the Lord' more than once; they'd watched him eat and listened to him teaching, more than once. But Thomas is having none of it. What was Scepticism's problem? Evidence for the Resurrection wasn't lacking and as I have remarked before, a bookie would have given Thomas poor odds on Jesus NOT having risen, on the basis of that evidence.

Neither Thomas nor any of the other disciples had not died when Jesus had travelled back into Galilee in spite of Thomas saying 'Lets die with him' etc; he had not had all the drama that perhaps he had wanted; a rising from the dead was not helping his scepticism and it meant bye-bye to his old life. Thomas resisted for as long as he could and then some, and finally folded:

'My Lord and My God' he exclaims on Low Sunday, as we've heard in our reading. In fact Thomas' assertions went well beyond the orthodox theology of the time and he now grasped that what all this rising meant, that it is catastrophic for the old order of things. Thomas now knew that he had set eyes on the God through whom the entire Universe was created. Plainly he was a bright individual who could make that conceptual jump; make the jump to understanding what all this means; could finally put scepticism to bed.

And so we can be encouraged about our own acceptance of the Resurrection; we can know that child-like (rather than child-ish) acceptance of our scriptures, short-cuts so much Thomas-like heart-ache.

But still there was a world outside that upper room which was thinking everything was still exactly the same. The worst sceptic had just discovered how wrong scepticism could be, but the rest of the world hadn't.

And this is where we find ourselves still today: the wonders and glories, the possibilities that the Resurrection enables, His love for us; are all there, all the time, for any and all who wish to take hold of them; the rest of the world carries on as though none of that is the case.

And so it seems to me that the gateway to the joy, to the possibilities that Christ alive in me is offering, are there if I will embrace them, but perhaps scepticism at times holds me back. This will be repelled as our scriptures quite plainly point out, by holding to the realities of those scriptures; by digging into them and spending the time in them. Of course it is not only scrip-

ture that does this: spending time with Christ in prayer is another, as is fellowship together. All these truths are revealed in our John's Gospel reading today.

There is a song I rather like which says 'I can make you feel good', but the foundation for any love I feel is from Christ; my hope in the future again comes from Him; the faith I need to know all this: once again, is His gift to me.

And its in rejecting any vestiges of scepticism, and in accepting that I am loved as demonstrated in Christ's life, death and indeed resurrection, that I am made able to love in return and to offer that love to those He puts before me, hour by hour and day by day.

Amen.