

‘....The Next Day and Beyond’

Our story continues, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday have all taken place and the people are beginning to realise what's taken place, and are already asking themselves, well what comes next, it's all over now, what are we to do? Jesus has appeared to the women, but do the men take their word for being the truth?

Thankfully we have the gospel of John to lead us towards what happened, we don't have to guess, surmise, or make up a story that suits us this time. That first easter evening unfolds with a surprising blend of fear, confusion, breathless news, and a fragile kind of faith. The disciples meet behind locked doors, hearts trembling because the world they believed would protect them has collapsed into chaos. Jesus appears, speaks peace, offering an invitation into a lived, ongoing presence: 'Peace be with you.' No harsh word of rebuke, or revenge, just peaceful love showing them his wounded and healed hands and side where they witnessed the bodily scars of hate and violence. Jesus, breathing on them the gift of the Spirit, commissioning them to continue what he had started. Then, a week later, Thomas, who missed the initial encounter, confronts his own doubt, (if I can't see it, then I don't believe it). Jesus meets him, with an invitation, OK you need to see and touch to believe, then go ahead, he does so, and then only then, does he say the words that have echoed down the ages: 'My Lord and my God!'

This reading puts our own human condition (sin) into front and centre. Doubt isn't the enemy of faith; it's a doorway through which our faith can be nurtured and grown. The disciples' fear and their desire for signs aren't dismissed. Instead Jesus meets them where they're at, offers peace in the midst of chaos, and then anchors them in a new reality; his resurrection reality, powered by love that defeats fear and re-creates the possibility of trust. In our own era of turmoil, political upheaval, environmental anxiety, a lack of trust in leadership at all levels; departments and organisations, personal losses, and systemic injustices, this part of the resurrection story is an invitation to us all into a contemporary reflection: faith isn't a naïve escape from the world's chaos, but a resilient response shaped and sustained by the living presence of a God who loves us greatly.

The abundance of Jesus' love becomes the wellspring from which hope flows. When the disciples hear those most comforting words, 'Peace be with you.' it isn't a quiet not to calmness but a bold, subversive act: a people called to carry a peace that doesn't depend on circumstances. This peace has the settling comfort of assurance in the face of danger, of rest in the eye of the storm, of courage to keep going when the door remains firmly shut by fear. It's a peace that doesn't erase pain but reframes it. It's a peace that doesn't make sense to those who don't know it. Jesus breathes the Spirit upon them, a divine breath initiating purpose and empowering mercy, justice, and witness. **In times of chaos, this Spirit-infused peace becomes a steady refrain: you're not abandoned; I have claimed you as one of mine, you are loved; you're sent to care for what happens to your neighbour in the same way as God cares about what happens to you.**

The acts of Jesus that John left with us give us an image of God who isn't distant from us, but, intimately involved. Jesus meets the disciples in their locked room, literally safe, emotionally guarded, and invites them to receive the Holy Spirit and the mission that follows which is now our mission. The presence of God isn't a one-off experience but a perpetual reality sustaining

resilience. When life seems to unravel, the promise remains: I am with you always. Our lives as Christ's followers, in our time is a training in noticing God's continual acts of intervention in our lives. It could be in the sound of a friend's voice offering timely wisdom, a sudden sense of strengthening of prayer, or the courage to forgive, to risk, to serve where there's danger. The risen Jesus is at work even when we can't see him, and this certainty reframes what we call 'chaos' as a field of action where love, mercy, and truth can operate through us.

Doubting Thomas' eventual strong belief is for us an invitation to engage honestly and authentically with the mystery of faith. His demand to see and touch isn't met with any condemnation, instead it's met with grace: 'Put your finger here and see my hands.' God doesn't shame our need for evidence, God offers us an invitation to recognise a deep mystery that Jesus is Lord and is alive, not dead. Thomas' confession 'My Lord and my God!' is perhaps the most concise creed for a time like ours: belief grounded in the reality of Jesus who defeats death, who loves us to the end, and who remains Lord over all of our most chaotic days. If we translate this into our present moment, we hear Jesus saying to each of us, it's precisely in your questions that you just might discover a more intimate trust; your longing for signs can become a doorway to deeper independence on the One who will never ever abandon you.

My thoughts for this morning also contain my continual encouragement for maintaining a daily spiritual discipline for sustaining hope, peace and resilience. Reading a chapter of scripture, praying, and communal worship anchor us in the reality of God's presence. Acts of service, even small and quiet, become visible signs of the Spirit's work in the world. Speaking truth with gentleness, offering forgiveness, choosing generosity when fear tempts us toward scarcity are all tangible ways God's love bears fruit in chaotic times. None of us here have witnessed the resurrected Christ in the same way as the disciples did, we have been called to live as witnesses in another sense. We bear the signs of grace through our steadfast love and care for our neighbours, especially those who are most vulnerable.

As we live amid volatility, hostility, and fear we can gather together and listen for the word of peace, receive the Holy Spirit, and move outward in love. We will still lock our doors against anxiety, but the risen Christ will stand in the room of our fear and invite us to exhale into courage. Our resilience isn't a self-help achievement, it's a fruit of the ongoing presence of God who cares about what happens to us and through us. The God who breathed life into creation continues to breath hope into our fear, peace into our turmoil and love into our grief.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, thank you for meeting us where we are, in fear, doubt our fatigue and offering your peace, your Spirit, and your presence. Help us to trust your love enough to move toward those who suffer and to act with mercy in a world of chaos. Help us to confess you as Lord and God with honesty and courage, and to live as witnesses to the resurrection, even when we can't see all the signs. May your abundant love sustain our hope, deepen our peace, and strengthen our resilience today and always. Amen.