

Reflection the 2nd Sunday of Easter by Rev'd Peter Shaw.

Forgiving and Restoring

As we noted last week, it is rather important for us that the disciples weren't gullible. They didn't believe the Resurrection at first - the Crucifixion has been too horrible. There's no way they could have expected Jesus to rise - he was well and truly dead. Crucifixion made sure of it. The Romans made sure of it. The Jewish leaders were quite satisfied about Jesus' death, even if they wondered what might happen next.

We hear in today's reading that when Jesus appeared to his disciples, he came through a locked door and showed them his hands and feet. So they recognised without doubt that it was the same Jesus - as his wounds testified - though this physical presence did not have the limitations he had during his earthly life before the crucifixion - he came through a locked door.

But Thomas wasn't there, and he wanted proof! "Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe!" (v. 25)

The others hadn't believed until they saw, but Thomas seemed to be asking for even more tangible proof - proof that was given a week later when Jesus appeared to them again.

When presented with the evidence, Thomas was overwhelmed. Not only were his doubts gone, but he boldly affirmed Jesus as "My Lord and my God!"

Up to this point, Thomas must have wondered what on earth was going on, as indeed the other disciples had before Jesus appeared to them for the first time.

He must have been asking himself: Who was this Jesus whom he had been following these past three years? His trial was a travesty of justice. His death was a cruel end to a compassionate life. Was he just another of many great teachers, of many noble human beings whose ideas and example we need to ponder and absorb into our own thinking and life? Perhaps the best, but just another one all the same? Was he just a martyr to a cause, a victim of human jealousies - as a number of other great teachers had been?

Then Jesus appeared to him!

But he's alive! "My Lord and my God!" Not one among many, but the only one who deserves my final commitment and allegiance! From this point on, I must live to do his will!

John's gospel began, "In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son" (Jn. 1.1,14). Here is Thomas affirming the point with which this fourth gospel begins.

Faith and eternal life

We, of course, are people who believe without having seen. And from the time of the ascension, that is how it must be. "How happy are those who believe without seeing me!" (v. 29)

Jesus is not saying that we are to believe without evidence, but that for all of us there is solid evidence for resurrection faith.

Francis Schaeffer - an American Theologian - points out, "Is Jesus saying by this that believing is a blind leap of ungrounded faith? Quite the opposite! Because Thomas insisted on seeing and touching Jesus in his resurrected body, we have been given, in the Gospels through this very touching and real example of human doubt, an even clearer evidence of the Resurrection than we would otherwise have had.

But Jesus is saying that Thomas should have believed without this additional evidence, because the evidence available to Thomas before was in itself sufficient. In other words, before Thomas saw and heard Jesus in this way, he was in the same position as we are today. Both he at that time and we today have the same

sufficient witness of those who have seen and heard and who have had the opportunity to touch the resurrected Christ"

And what is this happiness, this special blessing, to those who believe? Verses 30 and 31 give the purpose of this gospel. "In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life."

Jesus had said, "I have come in order that you might have life-life in all its fullness" (Jn 10.10b). That was the purpose of his living, dying and rising again. The invitation to believe in him is an invitation to share in this life.

Sharing the Message

But we are not only to share in the life ourselves. He commissions us to share the message with others.

At the beginning of today's reading, on that Sunday evening when Jesus showed himself to the ten disciples, we hear him saying to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you" (v. 21). The redemptive work of Christ is complete - we cannot add to it. But he sends us to make it known to the people of the world about us. They too must be given the opportunity to believe and to receive the gift of eternal life.

An orphaned boy was living with his grandmother when their house caught fire. The grandmother, tried to get upstairs to rescue the boy but perished in the flames. The boy's cries for help were finally answered by a man who climbed an iron drain pipe and came back down with the boy hanging tightly to his neck.

Several weeks later, a public hearing was held to determine who would receive custody of the child. A farmer, a teacher, and the town's wealthiest citizen all gave the reasons they felt they should be chosen to give the boy a home. But as they talked, the lad's eyes remained focused on the floor.

Then a stranger walked to the front and slowly took his hand from his pockets, revealing severe scars on them. As the crowd gasped, the boy cried out in recognition. This was the man who had saved his life. His hands had been burned when he climbed the hot pipe. With a leap the boy threw his arms around the man's neck and held on for dear life. The other men silently walked away, leaving the boy and his rescuer alone. Those marred hands had settled the issue.

Jesus showed Thomas (and the other ten) his hands and his side - the evidence that he had died, the evidence that he is alive. Surely we cannot fail to be moved by his great sacrifice. Like Thomas, we can affirm him, "My Lord and my God!"

According to tradition, Thomas went on missionary journeys that took him to India. When the first Christian missionaries in modern times came to India, they found a Church already established there - the Mar Thomas church which claims its origins in the apostle Thomas.

To say "My Lord and my God!" is not just a private personal relationship but a commitment to action in response to what Christ has done and who he is. What is our response to Christ - as individuals and as a congregation - in the community and world-scene in which we live? AMEN