

Sermon 12 April 2015

1 John 1:1-2:2 John 20:19-31 'No need to lock ourselves away'

Prayer: Risen Christ, breathe upon us your spirit of new life. Where we cannot see, help us to keep our minds open and trusting. Strengthen us as we seek to know you, and help us to grow in love for you and for each other. Amen.

“No need” – who ever devised our worship material for the next 5 weeks wants us to get this message! No need – and this week we have no need ***to lock ourselves away***. The picture is of course from John's story about what the disciples did straight away after Jesus had died so horribly on the cross.

Even with the good news of Easter Sunday, that he was risen, they still locked themselves away. But – wait **today's** story told us that not all of them locked themselves away. Thomas was already out and about – not hiding with the others in an upstairs room..... Thomas had not locked himself up – and the price of this was that he was not with the rest when Jesus as the “Risen One” first came into their presence.

The first thing the Risen One did was to offer peace, his peace which is an antidote to ‘fear’. The text is clear the disciples locked themselves away because they were afraid – no judgement – They had every right to be genuinely afraid. And the first thing Jesus does is confront it and offer a way through.

I have put the verse on the screen because it was pointed^{*1} out for me this week that the two statements of Jesus ‘peace’ frame the action of Jesus in showing his hands and side. It is on this basis, **his wounds**, that peace is won. The cost of the peace which is not like the worlds, and really works for us – the cost of this ‘otherworldly peace’ = Jesus ‘peace’ is counted in his wounds – ***which*** by the time he offers ‘peace’ have become scars. Treasure the peace of Christ – it was and is - not cheap! Cv

Jesus ‘peace’ is the antidote to fear – fear that locks us away and **keeps us in hiding** – it is as true for us today as it was for his first disciples, it's as true for us as a church today as it was for the church that existed when John was writing – fear must be addressed first.

In our partner Churches today there is an almost overwhelming emphasis on the need to be strategic and plan for the future, to be intentional about the future and not just ‘let it happen’ / to be mission focused / thinking / acting / ... and usually what is implied – is that this ‘activity’ is incompatible with what normally happens on Sunday's, and in our churches.

So amongst all the possible reasons today we are offered ‘fear’ as one of the strongest reasons that keeps us locked away – and ‘safe’. Fear comes from a huge variety of backgrounds – for the early disciples it was fear of the roman and temple authorities because of their association with a crucified man. But what if it was also a fear of being hurt – ***again***. When you love – you get hurt; and when we hurt we hide away – it was the Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth who said ‘Grief is the price of love’. Loving costs – and it hurts when grief enters the room – for whatever reason. The scars of the heart take a long time to heal – longer than Jesus wounds did to heal, that's for sure!

We are a wounded people – we are a fearful people – we love and grieve – just like our first disciples, and because of Thomas, we are blessed because we believe without ‘seeing’ for ourselves. Thomas is such a wonderful character for us – he is so open with his belief it makes room for us with our own wounds and scars to be able to kneel at the Risen One's feet and say – ‘My Lord and My God’.

You see if we think it is all about us, our feelings and fears – we've got it horribly wrong. It is about us – but it's not all about us, it's all about the Risen One and his part in God's story. If it were all about us – we'd really be like those first disciples – locked away. Even after they experience the Risen one and receive his peace – and a few other wonderful gifts – even they are – still locked away – 8 days later!!!

*1JPetty, *2 K Matthews, W Loader,

It is this 2nd meeting that is a crucial turning point in the story of the early church for the writer. Most if not all translations begin verse 26 as we heard it today –“A week later...” But ^{*1}the Greek actually has: “After 8 days...” It is crucial for John because he wants us to know that with Jesus, with the Risen One it is a completely new beginning for the world, for people, for all of God’s Creation, on the 8th day.

You see, John uses chapter 1 of Genesis as his template to tell us about Jesus. There are 7 signs of Jesus before he was crucified and in Bible language 7 is the number of completion and wholeness, these seven "signs" give us a complete picture of Jesus. It is understood that by "Other signs" John means that even this “complete” view cannot fully express the meaning of who Jesus was.

In verse 31 John tells us that the exact reason of the ‘sign’s is so that **you** which is plural, so it is an ‘all of us’ *you* – **You might come to faith**. *Being picky in translation* is not always a good thing, but again sometimes it helps to have something presented – truthfully another way. “The Signs” are so that – and most translations say – so that you may ‘believe’- whereas the translated word is *pisteuein*, which is a verb, and should be translated as "faith". ie ... “so that you may faith”. But if we use "faith" as a verb like this it doesn’t sound right for us in English, so it is usually translated –*inaccurately* ^{*1}--as "believe." But, J Petty says, but "Believe" is a cognitive function, and "faith" is more an orientation of a person's entire being. "Trust" captures the sense of *pisteuein* much better than does "believe." “The Signs” exist so that we **may trust Jesus** is the Christ, the Son of God and that by trusting you may have life in his name.

It is actually all about trusting Jesus – the Risen One **and having life**. All through John’s Gospel when he writes about life – he means *zoe* – this is not just a living organism, but the very basis of all life. **Trust** in Jesus puts one in intimate connection with the **source of life itself**. Trust in Jesus puts us into God’s story as much as Jesus was – trust in Jesus gives us the same life that Jesus had – physical, real, here and now – **and** life with God forever.

De Laar says that: ‘Once we recognise that God’s life flows through everything and everyone, we can open ourselves to see the connections that God’s life creates, and then we can begin to experience and enjoy our connectedness, ultimately working toward unity and interdependence.’ I would rephrase it and say once we see ourselves in God’s story **we know we belong** not only to our immediate family, but to an every widening circle of God’s family who trust and follow Jesus.

This may or may not be called ‘church’ as we know it, there just might be some ‘outside’, but it is a community, a fellowship who trust in Jesus – first. This is not about a private affair – locked away, hiding in fear. When Jesus ‘breathed’ the Spirit into them – John’s version of ‘Pentecost’ - these weak and fear stricken disciples, are now Spirit-gifted, and Jesus' gift to the world – that **all might have life**.

Breathing belongs to the image of the spirit which in biblical languages means wind and breath and spirit. John uses the range of meanings eg: 3:9 (the spirit/wind blows where it wants to). Perhaps he does mean to evoke the image of God's breathing upon human clay in the creation story. What he wants us to see is that here is a new beginning. The Spirit, the helper, will help the disciples lay the claim of Jesus before people. 16:8-11 explains how: the cross becomes a mirror in which to become convinced about sin (which is killed), goodness (which is vindicated) and judgement (because evil is disempowered). In 20:23 gives them the power and authority to give structure and discipline to the community. This is to be ministry and community with accountability – a new beginning!

The starting point for them – **and us**, *remember* Thomas’s gift to us is that **we belong**? The starting point is to receive God’s Spirit, to practice forgiveness and **to go into the world** as those who are sent, like Christ, to bring the grace, compassion, and justice of God into the world. Then, as we “walk in the light” with one another, we will begin to know the fellowship that John wrote about. By trusting Jesus, the Risen One we can take risks and we discover abundant, limitless life in our connectedness with God and one another and **we know** there is no need to lock ourselves away. Amen

^{*1}JPetty, ^{*2}K Matthews, W Loader,