

Sermon 27 April 2014  
Acts 2:14a, 22-32 John 20:19-31 'Wounded Hands'

*Prayer: Gracious God, your love reaches us through doors bolted by fear and doubt; your life reaches us through wounds and scars. Help us to hear your words of peace and healing; fill our hearts with joy so that we too may confess you as our God. Amen.*

On the radio on 24<sup>th</sup> / Thursday morning there was an article in the news from Gaza about a reconciliation assurance between the Palestinians and the Israelis. And they were asking 'locals' what they thought, and a woman's voice said: 'I'll believe reconciliation when I can touch it.'

When you really want to believe something – when you really want it to be 'real' – you have to be able to 'touch' it and the funny thing is that it's not the touch that saves the day but the faith that this touch signifies and attests to. For the Palestinian woman by being able to touch the "agreement to reconcile" **her faith** in the process, in the governments, in the stated desire for reconciliation – **her trust** would be restored, renewed, and her faith, her life allowed to grow and deepen.... Cv sept4 2011

Faith growing and deepening because of the discovery of Easter Sunday morning is the focus of the next 50 days. This is the traditional Church season of 'Easter'. So today is Easter 2 but it is not the First Sunday "after" Easter, it is the Second Sunday "of" Easter. We have *spent* the past 6 weeks on a journey to Easter – with Jesus through the desert and the wilderness, spending time in introspective, penitential reflection. We have journeyed to Jerusalem, witnessed healings and controversies, listened in on conversations, wondered about Jesus decisions, sat with the disciples and stood with the crowd. Then there was **the** cross, with death and confusion and despair. But that was not all: there was the most unexpected: resurrection, new life, death conquered and hope reborn. (K Huey-Matthews)

We **have begun** a new season in the church's narrative based on what John wrote so long ago: "**31** But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Life is the result of Jesus resurrection. Life for us, in his name because on Easter Sunday morning Jesus rose from death to life overcoming the ultimate power that would separate us from God forever more. **Death** is one expression of separation and **death lost its power** in Jesus on Easter Sunday morning. Peter says: "**32** God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact." April07 2013

Peter was one who had the real thing in front of him, **he touched** the wounds, **he** not only **saw, heard** the stories but he was present and touched Jesus – for Peter it was fact, it was real, it happened. **You and I** might want to question, verify, ask for ourselves but one thing we know – Peter was a transformed man because of Easter Sunday morning and meeting the risen Jesus. Peter's speech reflects the early communities framing the resurrection event within their scriptures when he quotes Psalm 16. *Scholars today might* want to question his authority to re-frame the psalm in this manner but we all know that's what the Christian community did to both make sense what was happening before their very eyes and to ground what was happening in the faith that they knew, loved and followed.

JVDLaar says: "The resurrection may be an interesting historical fact, but if that's all it is, it has little value for us today. This week's Lectionary readings make it clear, however, that the resurrection of Jesus is way more than just an event of the past. Every reading offers the assurance that God's life is available to us now in Christ." cV

John's gospel has two crucial sayings for 'us' of the future in the scriptures for us today. **1.** Jesus offers a specific blessing for a specific audience: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." **2.** John pointedly writes that Jesus "did many other signs" that he did not write about, but the ones he did write about "are written so that you might come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the

Son of God" and that this "believing" will bring you "life in his name." Cv (SacraconversaZione)

Loader says 'Life' the giving of it is the – THE central focus of John's gospel. It defines not only salvation but the agenda of mission and its context. Ultimately John's celebrations in narrative of the Easter message point to life as its message. Before and after Easter it is still life. The **change** is that now there are new bearers of that life and the Spirit given without measure to Jesus (3:34) now operates without measure among the disciples and makes Jesus' presence real to them (14:22-26). In today's story Thomas needs to get there. He has to transition **from** Jesus as God-with-us, through Jesus-the risen Christ **to** Jesus in the world through "me" by the power of the Holy Spirit. cV

It is the church's claim that God became a *person* with an actual human body in a specific time in human history and with a unique personality. In the scriptures, this claim **does not weaken** after his execution. It actually takes on a meaningful insistence. After he was raised, he ate, drank, talked with his followers, the gospels declare. On the Sunday after Jesus was raised, **he** insisted Thomas touch his wounds. It would not be hard for us to assume that when the Risen Jesus was reunited with his followers they laughed, remembered, shared memories and Jesus renewed promises he had made before he was executed. *After the agony* and violence of Thursday night; the spectacle of execution on Friday, the **despair** of Saturday and Magdalene's surprising news, John's *narrative returns* to the conversational Jesus at dinner on Sunday night.

It was at that dinner that Jesus commanded us to remember him: 'This is my body, this is my blood... Do this to remember me.' Jesus was God in the flesh – who lived died and rose again. But we also have our Scriptures insisting on **another kind of embodiment**; the church becomes the continuing embodiment of Christ. In the intimacy among friends who had known him through everything that had happened, he passed to them the responsibility/opportunity to become his body in the world. He assured them they could do it, they would have the abilities because of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

At next Sunday's gathering of his followers, Jesus took the occasion of Thomas' need for independent, tactile experience to bless all those in the future who would come to the same experience in the fellowship of other believers. *John makes clear that the transition* is underway: the physical presence of the raised Jesus transfers/relays an experience/conviction to those who believed as well as all those in the future who will also believe. ->

Time is erased; equally blessed are those who believe, no matter their timing. These "post-resurrection appearances" are *not about* a "ghost" that "appeared" to women and men who immediately became perfectly formed believers; **they are about** an embodied Person around whose Presence grew a community of believers of all kinds and expressions of believing, the 'body' of Christ, "those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (SacraconversaZione)

Through the gift of Thomas's need to touch, we have a scene from Jesus life told to us by John that is a celebration of the Church (Loader), its constitution and its task. Jesus sends the disciples, **all of them, just as he was sent**. This is the premise for discipleship. It sets **our agenda** by directing us to what Jesus did, especially as he is portrayed in John. Jesus offered light and life and truth through relationship with himself, through relationship with God. **Our role** is also to offer light and life and truth through a relationship with God. This does not *equate* us and Jesus, **but the task is the same**.

As he was God's representative, so his disciples are to be ambassadors, to use Paul's image from 2 Cor 5:20. Like the Jewish 'shaliach' (envoy) and in keeping with the ways of communication before the days of telecommunication and the internet, the message bearer often needed to be able **to act for and on the authority** of the one who did the sending. It is an authority to offer the relationship in which **is life**. Thank goodness Thomas needed to touch the real thing – to trust and believe, **because we** have the blessing and the commissioning to make Jesus real – right down to his wounded hands. Amen