

Sermon for 28th April 2019 Rev'd Jenny Simson

Today is the second Sunday of Easter. Last week we walked with Jesus through his passion, crucifixion and resurrection. And now we continue in the season of Eastertide –known as the great fifty days.

It was during the first 40 days, beginning on the day of his resurrection, that the risen Jesus was present in bodily form to his disciples, and the stories of his presence among them is captured in the gospel stories. After 40 days Jesus ascended in bodily form in a dramatic final departure as the gospel of Luke describes.

In today's gospel reading from John we hear the first words of the risen Jesus to his disciples. He appeared before them as they huddled together in a room behind locked doors afraid of the religious authorities of the day. At this, their time of deep fear, Jesus came to them and stood among them and gave them what they desperately needed: *Peace be with you*, he said. We recall here the words Jesus spoke at the last supper. *Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.* In the room with the disciples Jesus shows them the nail wounds in his hands and the wound in his side. They are looking on the one whom they have pierced, and they see that he is alive and has come to them as he promised.

The gift of Jesus' peace overflows in that particular special joy that comes only with communion with Jesus. The hearts of the disciples in every age, beginning with the first disciples, are indeed filled with joy - for the one they love has risen from the tomb and is now with them as the risen one. The new day has dawned.

In John's gospel more than any other, the narrative makes it very clear that the risen lord comes to us personally and that restoration takes place through individual encounter. John specifies that we are met where we are and from that place, wherever it is, our newness is enabled to come into being. The examples of the risen Jesus with Mary, Thomas and Peter in John's gospel are examples of personal encounter.

Mary meets Jesus at the tomb on the morning of the resurrection and when she finally recognizes him she wants to cling to him – now that she sees him she doesn't want to let him go – she wants to cling to how things used to be, how he had made her feel worthy, how he upheld her without judgement, but Jesus tells her not to cling to the past - for she was now able to go on in her newness as Mary the one sent with good news in the authority of the risen lord.

In today's gospel reading we hear the story of how Thomas doubted the other disciples when they told him about the risen Jesus and it wasn't until Jesus appeared before him and he was able to put his fingers in Jesus wounds that he believed.

Jesus came to him and gave him what he needed in his time of doubt and when Thomas received this, he made a most dramatic shift from being someone who doubted, to the very first of the disciples to proclaim Jesus as *My lord and my God*. Thomas later carried by his strong faith to the east, delivering the gospel message and was eventually martyred for his faith.

Then there is the story of Peter who had denied Jesus three times. After the crucifixion he returned to his work as a fisherman and it was there on the beach, that the risen Jesus came to him, and gave him the opportunity to affirm his love for him. Jesus asked him three times if he loved him. Peter confessed his love, and thereafter took on a new form of serving the vulnerable, the needy, the dependent and those without courage.

Mary, Thomas and Peter are met where they are - each had their own very personal encounter with the risen lord that set them on a new path.

The risen Jesus does the same with us – with you and me.

When our faith is hindered by the lack of self-worth like Mary Magdalene, or doubt like Thomas or the lack of courage like Peter, the risen Jesus comes to meet us where we are and it is there through a very personal encounter that our life's story is given a new direction by Jesus risen from the dead.

Let us pray:

Dear Risen Lord, unlock our resistance to your joy and peace – open our hearts to gratefully receive your encounter with us that leads into our wholeness in you.

Amen.