

Peace Be With You..

... and carry on: step by step; day by day

A reflection given on Low Sunday 19th April 2020, in the Online Service by the Associate Vicar, the Revd Wendy Wale

John 20:19-end

Wendy gives a 2-minute visual introduction.

[In the reading, Thomas has] famously declared, *"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

But you see, here's the thing: we have the benefit of [a] wide-angled lens; we've read the Easter story from the beginning. Most of us have probably heard countless sermons about the different characters and the events; we've seen and absorbed the big picture conclusions: Thomas doubted; Judas betrayed; Peter disowned; Mary wept; Jesus rose from the dead. We no longer have to solve the puzzle; the clues have already been solved and we've got the answers.

But perhaps for a moment we can imagine ourselves back into the drama as it was unfolding - we can stand alongside Thomas as a man whose closest friend, teacher and inspiration had been brutally murdered. And Thomas had seen Jesus' body being put into a cave with a huge stone rolled across the entrance: Thomas, who dreamed of being a hero; bringing in the revolution; whose hopes and dreams are crushed; whose plans have been interrupted; who is experiencing the most intense grief he has probably ever known; who was in shock and trauma from all he has seen and experienced; Thomas, who has no benefit from the wide-angled lens.

He knew the political backdrop, the historical prophecies, the rhetoric of change all tied up in the one they called Jesus, the one he called 'master'. The one who was most definitely dead.

As I stop even for a moment, I see Thomas as a very real human. He's not defined by doubt. He's living the reality of grief. It's not lacking trust. He's reeling from the consequences of trusting Jesus with his whole life.

Right now, we are all living in a period of history that will undoubtedly change the world forever. One where right now the lens is so close, no one can truly explain what is going on, what is going to happen when or how. The very best of minds and leaders around the world are working to see more clearly; to protect more thoroughly; to heal more effectively. But the lens is still very close; the grief is raw; and the sense of helplessness consuming.

Let us hear afresh these words:-

'Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said "Peace be with you." Such powerful words for this time - *'Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them.'* The doors of the Minister, of all our churches are shut; the doors of our homes are shut to visitors. But Jesus is not constrained by doors or limitations.

As we celebrate his resurrection, we celebrate the fact that death is defeated and his presence is available to us all, whatever our circumstances: in our loneliness or busyness; in our health or our sickness; in our joys and griefs and fears; in our home schooling or our furloughed rhythms. The simple statement, 'Peace be with you' is offered with love and without condition: 'Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands; reach out your hand and put it in my side.'" Jesus didn't mock or reject Thomas's need for physical connection and proof of a new reality.

Our frustration at being separated from those we love, our longing to return to our familiar communities, rhythms and relationships, are part of our humanity. We need to practise self-compassion: to allow ourselves and others to struggle with the view close-up; to forgive ourselves for not having the full picture; for doubting; for throwing a tantrum or two.

Perhaps you, like me, have taken inspiration this week from Captain Tom Moore, the ninety-nine-year-old who has raised so much money for the NHS. He's done it by shuffling along, putting one step in front of the other, day by day by day, supported by his frame and his family, motivated by the bigger cause.

So let us carry on together, step by step, day by day, supported by the frame of our faith and our family in Christ, motivated by the presence and the promises of Jesus - "Peace be with you.

Reading Texts

John 20: 19-end

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." ²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." ²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.