

# There is hope ...

## *... Jesus' love is stronger than death*

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*A sermon given on the Second Sunday of Easter, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2021, by the Associate Vicar, the Revd Wendy Wale, in the Attended Communion Service.*

*Exodus 2: 1-10; John 19:25b-27*

If somebody asked you what Easter was really all about, I wonder what you'd tell them. I hope that your answer would include Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection. But if they then asked, why did Jesus have to die and what difference does it make either to an individual or to the world, it can be really hard to put into words. You might have a simple answer: he died for my sin; or for the sins of the whole world; you might say it's because of love, John 3:16 *'God so loved the world that he gave his only son that everyone who believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.'* But you might wish to consider new creation, recreation, the second Adam and 'inaugurated eschatology'; you could join the theological debates around 'penal substitution' and the array of atonement theories (and I'm watching Ben come out in a cold sweat because he's studying these currently in his theology course) But now try and explain all that in a way that a young child could understand, of course, recognising that children so often understand huge concepts of faith much more easily than we adults do.

It's perhaps no surprise that the commercial world has reinvented Easter with a bunny at the centre: bunnies and eggs and chocolate - just much simpler. I say this not to reduce the heart of everything, but perhaps to give some context when we approach the story of Thomas, so often known as Doubting Thomas, as if he somehow lacked the faith of the other disciples. Thomas echoes the confusion of everyone who struggles to grasp the enormity of what others were claiming had happened: *'We have seen the Lord.'* Thomas hadn't seen the Lord, not since he saw his dead body being laid in a tomb with a ton of boulder rolled across the entrance and dead men don't rise. He wasn't being fooled by rumours about this radical teacher again. He needed proof. He couldn't explain what was going on: *"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."* And then there's this incredible moment: Jesus simply appears amongst the disciples and declares, *"Peace be with you."* He then turns to Thomas and offers him the proof, the encounter he needs. *"Put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but*

*believe.*" This really is Jesus, physically risen from the dead, and whilst perhaps somewhat changed, he still bears the marks of the wounds inflicted upon him on the cross.

And then Thomas utters these words, *"My lord and my God."*

Thomas is the first person in John's gospel to look at Jesus and directly address him as God. His words complete the circle, taking us right back to the beginning of John's gospel. Right back to the beginning of all things:

***"In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God."***

Those glorious words that ring out every Christmas-time finally come to life through Thomas. Thomas, the disciple who finally gets it; the moment that John has been drawing us all towards from his very first word; the word who was God and has now made the invisible God visible; he's brought life and light into the world; the light shines in the darkness; the darkness did not overcome it. The resurrection is what happens when the creator himself comes to heal and restore his world; the light shining in the darkness; the end returning to the beginning; the creator to creation.

***"In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God."***

The words that complete John's message, a glorious declaration of who Jesus is, who God is, but also of what it means for the whole of creation and for us, his followers.

When Jesus greets his disciples, he offers them his peace and then he commissions them to continue the recreation, to carry on what he came to do. As he sends them out, he breathes on them, again a reference back to the beginning of things, to Genesis chapter 2, when God breathed life into Adam. *"Receive the Holy Spirit"* the very breath and power of God; go and forgive sins; be agents of transformation; carry the risen Lord Jesus to whoever you meet, to every part my world.

***"In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God."***

As followers of Jesus today, the call is the same: to be Easter people bringing the very life of God into situations and places that need healing, peace, reconciliation or transformation. As we come this morning to share the peace and to receive the bread and wine, we are one with the disciples, we are stepping into the resurrection, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, the very breath of God.

***"In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God."***

As individuals, we will all have experienced loss and death this past year. As a town, we are grieving the young man, Riley, whose life was cut short so very suddenly and tragically on Friday night as he rode his bicycle. As a nation, we mourn for his Royal Highness, Prince Philip, and we remember Her Majesty, the Queen and all who have lost their most precious loved ones.

Because of the message of Easter, the heart of the gospel, the completed work of Jesus, we can trust God with our deepest agonies and pain. We can experience his peace. We can trust that Jesus truly is the resurrection and the life. His love is stronger than death. There is hope.

***"In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God"***

## Reading Text

John 20:19-end

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.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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.' 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.' 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.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' 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.' Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 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.