

11th April 2021

A reflection on John 20:19 by Theresa Powell

I can understand the disciples hiding away in a locked room! It was the evening of the resurrection, only three days ago Jesus had been crucified. All the disciples except Peter had run away. Peter had stood watching what was happening to Jesus, and when asked by several people if he was with Jesus, Peter denied him three times! The crowd had been angry and volatile, easily led to call for the crucifixion of Jesus; the disciples were afraid that the 'Jews' or rather the temple elders would come looking for them.

Then Jesus appears to them in the room, John does not tell us how this happens, does he literally suddenly appear? 'He came and stood among them', and he spoke giving the shalom greeting, peace be with you, this must for the disciples been a balm for their fear, especially when Jesus confirmed to them who he was by showing his wounds. There was great celebration, a relief, everything he had said was true, he has risen!

This seems to be the beginning of their Apostolic life, as Jesus says to them that as God sent Jesus, so Jesus is sending them.

John has Jesus giving them the Holy Spirit now; Jesus empowers them to forgive sins, or retain them. But what does Jesus mean here? I think traditionally it has been about the forgiveness of sins, and giving the priestly absolution. But it could also be more to do with a different sin. In John 15-26-27 it is the Spirit, whom Jesus sends from the Father, and who testifies about Jesus and equips people to offer testimony and teaching about him, this spirit glorifies God John 16:14. From the resurrection on the route is forward, Christ's resurrection releases the Holy Spirit to us, to have belief and faith and to act that out. John 15:22 "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin." and John 9:39-41, "I came into the world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and who do see may become blind" It is the reply from the Pharisees, and the conversation that follows which is the most revealing. "Surely we are not blind are we? Jesus said to them 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say 'We see' your sins remains".

That is the point; what Jesus means about sin in this context, it's about knowledge of God, basically Jesus is saying if you

know God but do nothing then you have sinned, but if you live by God's laws and spread the word of the Lord you have not sinned. But during all this Thomas was not there with his friends. He must have realised after that he had missed something special. Jesus had not forgotten Thomas, a week later Jesus comes back, and Thomas is there. Thomas is especially remembered for doubting that they had seen the Lord, he wanted to be able to confirm it for himself. We are like that as well, as we grow older we become more suspicious of things, and rightly, there are too many swindlers out there. I had an email the other day supposedly from a friend asking me to do something for her. It was very convincing until in the text she said that she was 'out of town', I knew she would never say something like that. I phoned her, she was at home, it was an attempt to get my card details.

So Jesus invites him to put his hands into his wounds. Thomas is also overcome with emotion that this is the risen Lord. The part which for me means the most is Jesus saying "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe". That is us! We see this witness in so many ways in our own communities, the way people have survived isolation and

loneliness during this pandemic, the way shops have offered help to families who normally have free school meals. People on Facebook offering help in picking up shopping for older people, and parents of young children who are sheltering because of ill health. There is love and compassion out there probably from people who would not think of themselves as Christians.

As we have our support systems in place so did the early church, they were communities just like us. |In Acts 4 we have the lovely description of the community of believers living together, sharing everything, and supporting each other. 'everything they owned was held in common'. This is the picture of what we should be doing in this modern world, and to a large extent we do through taxation, charities and food banks. They were great teachers, 'with great power the Apostles gave their testimony' , this was about the resurrection of our Lord, the early teaching, before they had developed their gospel to teach about the life of our Lord. For us I think there is always more to do, by praying, and keeping in spiritual touch with God, and keeping an eye out for those people or issues that need our attention. Amen