

This morning we are going to look at the Gospel reading.
Two of the resurrection appearances of Jesus.

Lets set the scene.

For three, very full, and mind blowing years, the disciples have listened to Jesus and have witnessed astonishing things.

A man who can control the elements: Who can raise the dead: can make food multiply and confound the authorities.

They watched their teacher, master and the son of God, die. Brutally, three days ago. The disciples are confused and terrified. They thought they understood, but now Jesus is gone and they are lost. Lost in grief. Lost in direction and lost in purpose.

Mary Magdalene has seen Him and talked with Him. He is alive.

This frightens them. The Jewish authorities, who plotted to kill Jesus, do not like this and the disciples are in danger.

Hiding away, behind locked doors, they discuss the events. Probably arguing over the reports. Maybe feeling guilty about deserting Him, denying him. They had failed him miserably.

When suddenly, Jesus is with them. The doors are still locked.

NOTHING can stop Jesus. Locked doors, or death!

He is the gate for the sheep -John 10 v7, and he has appeared to his frightened sheep. Not to confront them with their failures but to bring them peace. 'Peace be with you'. And, to give them direction. He doesn't mess about. He is giving them purpose.

I love to think about how our Lord can do absolutely anything. Nothing can hold him. When we are in the deepest, darkest times, needing him, desperate, He is there. Sometimes the pressures, worries and overwhelming issues seem to cloud him out. But, he is with us.

Immanuel = God with us.

How do we reconnect with God when he seems so far away?

Of course the very famous Footsteps poem comes to mind. **pic

And, I am thankful for the support and prayers of friends and family.

Jesus does not expect the disciples to go out and reveal him and his message without help.

In John 14 v16&17 Jesus promised his followers another Counsellor, the spirit of truth...The Spirit of God himself, to be forever with them.

This is a foretaste of what all believers would experience at Pentecost, and for ever after. To do Gods work we need the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly, the Greek word used here is the same as the one found in Genesis 2:7 when 'God breathed into Adams nostrils' the breath of life. This word is not used anywhere else in scripture.

Man came alive because of the breath of God. A new creation.

Through this, God imparted eternal, spiritual life.

I'd like us to look at Thomas now.

One of the most misunderstood characters of scripture.

He got the name 'Doubting Thomas' all because he asked for tangible signs to shore up his belief. He thought that 'Seeing is believing'.

However, Thomas does not doubt the Risen Lord.

He doubts the word and witness of the Lords community.

He did not believe his friends.

We do not know much about Thomas.

He is mentioned in the story of the raising of Lazarus. Jesus delays his journey back to Judean territory. But when he decides to return, despite the danger for all of them, it is Thomas who says 'Let us go die with him!'

Thomas is fearless, and loyal. He is willing to stand with Jesus.

We see Thomas again at the last supper.

Jesus is talking of His own Passover into glory. But it sounds like riddles.

We can imagine Thomas' furrowed brows as he tries to understand.

He blurts out 'We don't know where you are going. How can we possibly know the way.'

John 14:5.

He spoke up, and asked what they all were probably thinking.

He is, Straight Forward Thomas. Direct and realistic.

It is helpful to see these glimpses of Thomas' character. And when he steps out of the locked room, to possibly get food. He is brave Thomas.

Thomas has been given a label from one poorly understood sentence.

A judgement of his character that is far from the truth.

How many of us live with a label like that? Something from childhood or adolescence.

From an action or words spoken; and now they have come to define you.

This is difficult and painful, because we do not want to stay living in the past. And be reminded of it constantly.

Thomas returns to find them still locked in the room; he doesn't quite believe their report.

Jesus has filled his friends with joy and empowered them with the Holy Spirit.

Why are they still hidden away? No visible evidence of Joy and confidence on their faces.

They have seen and spoken with Jesus. Risen. Alive.!

Thomas asks for what the others have received; to see Jesus, wounds and all.

How wonderful that Jesus turns up a week later to provide exactly what Thomas needs..

Isn't it interesting that a week later the disciples are still hiding?
Locked in a room where they meet.
Their actions do not match their understanding.

We have not seen and yet we believe. We are blessed even more. V29.

* Spending time researching and pondering on this passage I have learnt that :-

God is Immanuel – always with us. Once we are His we cannot be separated from him.
We can, of course *turn* from Him. But He will not leave us or forsake us.

Even though we may not have had an experience like Thomas; or witnessed a miracle like we read about in scripture; or experienced something amazing at new wine or spring harvest; we may feel we have missed out. But Jesus knows our individual needs. We can ask him for it. And when we believe, we are blessed.

Are we hiding, like the disciples?
Can the presence of the risen Jesus be seen on our faces?
Are we obviously a community that has seen the Lord and is being transformed?

And lastly, those of us who have been mislabelled can claim a new one.
As a beloved, and cherished son or daughter of Christ the King .A prince, or princess of the Most High God.

Let us pray..
Thank you Father for being with us and never leaving us.
May we own the identity **you** give us, your precious child.
And may we, as a church, shine the light of your love into our community.
To live by faith, to be known by love and to be a light of hope.
Amen.

Gilly Robinson