

19 APRIL 2020 SERMON
Acts 2 : 14A, 22 – 32 : John 20 : 19 - End

On this second Sunday of Easter perhaps we can identify more closely with our reading from John than at any other time in recent history. Locked doors and staying isolated from the rest of society for fear of an unseen enemy. Over the last weeks we have known what real fear is and where the presence of peace has been non-existent. Being excluded from the life we have known is a new experience.

Life for the disciples including Thomas was uncertain now that the presence of Jesus was no longer an every day reality. Life had changed and the disciples were meeting behind locked doors when Jesus came and stood amongst them when Thomas was absent. Thomas is called Doubting Thomas because when he did return to the community he did not believe they had seen Jesus. He needed visible proof for himself; proof that he could identify Jesus for himself. A week later Thomas was with the disciples when Jesus appeared again and repeated Thomas' words, ending with "Stop doubting and believe. Because you have seen me you have believed : blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Thomas was not alone in his unbelief. Before the Crucifixion the Jews did not believe in Jesus who they could see. God was working through His Son to change lives and situations from despair to hope. Hope is something we need at the moment. Hope for an ending of the virus and the suffering many are going through. One hope we can cling onto is that Heaven is real. On the day of Pentecost Peter told the Jews that when Jesus died his body did not rot in the grave because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. Jesus was resurrected. People did not always recognise him until familiar words and actions brought hope to their lives 2000 years ago. After 40 days he ascended into Heaven where he keeps the gates open for all people. Eternal life is a reality.

We are facing danger on an unprecedented scale and the future is uncertain. Jesus conquered the power of earthly death by showing the disciples his death was not the end. Hope of eternal life in Heaven is the promise our Lord gave to everyone.

For society in general we have stopped travelling miles to go to work and for leisure purposes. Our focus of attention has had to change. A few months ago our focus was too often on profit, performance levels and achieving ever increasing goals to make a perfect universal society. Now our focus is on saving lives and our local community through service and staying isolated.

This type of situation brought a new experience to the disciples' lives. The risen presence of Jesus brought the assurance there was life beyond the darkness they had known. He stood among them and said "Peace be with you" three times. Peace cannot be bought with money, performance levels and achieving goals. Peace is something we all need. Peace comes through trust. Trust we can come through this. Trust in a risen Lord, knowing he was with his disciples and is with us today.