

## Bennochy church 15th April 2012

If you thought you were a fugitive. What would you do? The chances are you would go on the run or go into hiding. Probably with sympathisers and certainly in a place where you hope the authorities would not find you. You would be in a state of agitation. Nervous at any sound. Who's coming? Wondering if you were going to be found. Anne Frank and her family hiding in Amsterdam from the occupying forces come to mind, an amazing story of bravery, resourcefulness and hope for the future, captured by a young girl in her diaries.

On the Sunday morning, Mary has found the tomb empty, met the risen Jesus and had gone to tell the disciples of what she had seen. In spite of that, we find the disciples that evening, locked away, fearing their association with Jesus, and the position that put them in, with the Jewish authorities.

What is going on? Are they still in mourning? Did they not believe Mary? Did they think the woman mad? Or were they just more fearful for themselves and what might happen to them, than what they hoped had happened to Jesus? Understandable. Let's not be too hard on the disciples, I suspect we might also have been in hiding.

Suddenly, Jesus is there! Let's not try to work this out. Let's just accept he was there, in spite of locked doors and solid walls. We will never know those first reactions, but let's imagine them! It

might have been shock, guilt and joy all rolled into one. This is not happening. Jesus says, *"Peace be with you"*. I saw him die! Jesus says, *"As the father has sent me, I send you"*. I don't believe this. Jesus says, *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven"*. As God breathed into Adam and brought the great army of dry bones to life, so here power is given to the disciples of Jesus. He had promised this to them. I wonder, with all that had happened, if they had forgotten his words. [See John 14: 25-26] *"I have told you this while I am still with you.<sup>26</sup> The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you"*.

They see the wounds in his hands and side, as a witness to the fact that this is the same Jesus who was crucified. Their friend. How could they now not believe? They have seen Jesus with their own eyes.

But there is always one who is not there. Thomas who for some reason did not feel the need to lock himself away. We don't know why. He hears the story, but he did not see the wounds. Before we condemn him, what would you have said to physical resurrection? Away with you, do you expect me to believe that story! You have seen a ghost or a spiritual vision. *'Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and hand in his side. I will not believe'*.

Jesus leaves it a week. The Passover festival is nearly over. It is soon time for the disciples to return to Galilee. I was wondering, what have the disciples been up to? Still locked in the room in spite of the gift of the Holy Spirit? What has Thomas been mulling over in his mind? Could it be true? Have I dismissed this too lightly? Do I believe, do I want it to be true?

The pattern is repeated. The door is locked, Jesus appears. He says, *"Peace be with you"*. The only difference this time is that Thomas is there, no longer in isolation but part of the community. Could this appearance be just for him? 'Put your finger here Thomas'. Imagine the scene. 'Stretch out your hand', he says, 'and put it in my side'. Did he? We are not told and it does not matter.

We are all like Thomas. We have our times of doubt. But unlike Thomas we will never experience something that was unique for him. To touch the risen Christ. Our message, and this is the key bit, our message is to believe without seeing. That is the normality of faith.

In seeing the risen Christ, Mary recognised who he was. In looking at the wounds of Christ, the disciples were filled with joy. In having the opportunity to touch Jesus, Thomas declared, *"My Lord and my God!"*

It is just after Easter. We have declared our faith, not because we have seen the physical risen Jesus, but blessed in believing,

without having the eyes of the disciples or the hands of Thomas.  
Amen