

Bennochy church: 15th April 2018

This is Luke's version of John's 'doubting Thomas' story, that we looked at last Sunday. The context is important. We find the disciples deep in conversation. They are trying to make sense of what has just happened. To recap. This is the recorded sequence of events according to Luke. Early in the morning, some women - Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James, discover the tomb is empty. They then go to tell this news to the apostles, who think they are talking nonsense. 'Away with you. Don't be daft!' But Peter, the man who first recognised Jesus as the Messiah, Peter the walker on water and, the man who denied Jesus 3 times, he runs to the tomb to see for himself. Like Thomas, again from last week, he does not want a second hand faith. He wants to find out for himself, and Luke says, he is amazed, at what has happened.

Enter the two people who met, and who eventually recognised Jesus, on their way home to Emmaus. They have come all the way back to Jerusalem, let's say about 7-8 miles, to share their experience. Imagine the conversation taking place, as they enter the room. At first does anyone notice their arrival? Maybe some people are talking over others. You do that when you are fully engaged and you want to have your say. The volume rising. Others might be deep in thought. Wondering, trying to get their heads around what people are saying. *'The Lord is*

risen, he has appeared to Peter.' What does that mean? Some are just sitting quietly at the corner of the room, listening in.

So they rush in. They have good news to share. 'You'll never believe what happened to us on the road to Emmaus!' They don't get to the end of their story. They are interrupted. Suddenly, Jesus is in their midst. *"Peace be with you."* What is offered is God's 'shalom'. A oneness that makes us as part of creation. A peace that says, we are at one with God. Our shalom, that knowledge of being one with who we are.

There is a contrast of emotions going on here. *'Peace be.... '*, they are terrified. And so would we be. They know who this is. They must have recognised him. That is not surprising since they had journeyed with him for the last 3 years, sharing all those gospel experiences, that we can read about, and probably much more. Yet in spite of the stories they are hearing, people saying, we have seen him, spoken to him, we have even eaten with him; in their heads, they know he should be dead! This must be the ghost of Jesus. Emotion and a sense of reality has take over, and they forget what Jesus had told them, of what would happen to him.

I am wondering about Peter, what is he thinking. What about the two just recently back from Emmaus? Are they trying to calm people down? It's OK. It's OK, we have just eaten with Jesus. We know this to be true. Is Peter trying to get a word in, 'Listen, I saw the tomb for myself, it was empty!' Or is the room

just deathly silent? In that moment, in spite of any recent encounters with the risen Christ they might have had, did they think, maybe our eyes and hearts deceived us?

I want you to put yourself in that room and in your imagination, look around. At the very moment Jesus appears, in that crowded room. Who is like us? Are we people of the pilgrim way, like those on the journey to Emmaus, having recently walked with Jesus, and have arrived to share their story. He taught us and he broke bread for us. Are we people of discovery, like the women, first to see what had happened. Or are we like Peter, who has expressed amazement at seeing the empty tomb. Are the words, *'He is risen'* on our lips, or are we an unnamed apostle, part of the conversation, debating what is going on, but unsure of its deep reality. Or are we just part of the crowd, listening in. Wanting to know more. Everyone in that room, is searching for the truth of Easter.

We all have our doubts and fears. Faith is that delicate balance between certainty on the one hand, and hope on the other.

What did the writer of the book of Hebrews say,

"To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see." (Hebrews 11:1)

What lies out of our sight, is always unknown. So that part of the journey, around the corner, will always be ones of faith. Hope in that which we cannot yet see.

This encounter with Jesus, in some way expresses the human condition. To touch is to know what is real. But faith is to believe when there is nothing to touch. That is hard. Faith is never easy. Some will say, if only Christ stood before us, people would believe. That is not how this story began!

This is their 'Thomas experience'. In spite of the physical evidence, which we will never have, there is fear. This is a ghost! As with Thomas, the wounds of hands and feet are shown. The offer to touch his flesh and bones is made. And they know, a dead man cannot eat.

The stories of scripture offer us our firsthand experience of God. That is the promise of the spirit. For those in the room, still to come. We too are witnesses to the events of Jesus Christ. Yet, unlike the apostles, we do not need to wait. The spirit is here. To strengthen our faith, to embolden our hope and to keep us certain, as pilgrim people we journey the way of God. Amen.