

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : April 11th, 2021
“Second Sunday of Easter”

EASTER 2 – LOW SUNDAY 2021

I begin with part of a quote from a poet, Malcolm Guite, who wrote in the Church Times last week: “There was something tentative and hesitant about the way in which we approached our second Holy Week and Easter still in lockdown. We were grateful this year not to be so utterly locked out of church and community as we were on that last strange Easter Day, but not quite sure how and where and whether to gather this time, how to keep company and at the same time keep safe. There must have been some similar hesitancy, caution and uncertainty for the first disciples about what they should do after the death and then the resurrection – and in their eyes the total disappearance – of their beloved leader. Our cautions and precautions are driven by anxiety about exposure to infection; theirs by fear of exposure to the authorities”.

Our Gospel reading this week gives us a strong and clear idea of what those first disciples were going through as the risen Jesus suddenly and unexpectedly appears to them. For some reason Thomas was absent – we know not where? Thomas – I guess one of the most familiar names from the New Testament is that of Thomas. Certainly, the most widely used Bible reading at a funeral is from John 14 verses 1 to 6 when Jesus comforts his disciples and assures them that there is a place in heaven for all; and in that passage, it is Thomas who shows the first seeds of doubt “Lord we do not know where we are going; how can we know the way?” I like

using that passage both for the reassuring words of Jesus that it gives and also for the elements of human doubt that is articulated by Thomas – doubts that are often in the minds of mourners at any funeral. Thomas gives us permission to doubt, to question faith at such times.

The resurrection stories are about people who are emotionally confused and drained. The exhausting events of the past week have them seeing but not recognising, wondering and agonising but not immediately able to make sense of anything. How human and reassuring for us to realise that it often takes years of living before we eventually grasp something of God's involvement in our journey. So often the evidence of his real, loving presence is staring us in the face, yet people assume any number of other factors are responsible, much as, for example, Mary assumed the risen Jesus to be the gardener or the way in which the two disciples travelling away from Jerusalem at first didn't recognise it was Jesus who was walking with them.

In all of these encounters, with great gentleness and courtesy, Jesus begins to reveal to them the full power and vibrancy of his new life, as still today he leads peoples at their own pace to recognise the astounding truth of his risen life. He lets them see only what they are capable of taking in, for he loves them and us and has no desire to scare or overwhelm.

But to return to Thomas. Although we know what words Thomas is reported to have said, I wonder what he was actually thinking? It's an intriguing question. So, I finish with this short passage from the Iona community called 'Thomas reflecting'. Through its words may we ponder Thomas and the lasting legacy that he has unwittingly left for generations of Christians. I hope that the wisdom of these words will give us all an insight into Thomas, who still today holds a firm place in the life of those first disciples and who encourages us, the Easter people of today, to continue to celebrate our belief in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.