

# Second Sunday of Easter

Written by Bishop Donald Kirk

Let's begin with the words of D A Carson, a biblical scholar who wrote this piece that aptly describes the attitude of many:

I would like to buy about three dollars worth of gospel, please. Not too much – just enough to make me happy, but not so much that I get addicted. I don't want so much gospel that I learn to really hate covetousness and lust. I certainly don't want so much that I start to love my enemies, cherish self-denial, and contemplate missionary service in some alien culture. I want ecstasy, not repentance; I want transcendence, not transformation. I would like to be cherished by some nice, forgiving, broad-minded people, but I myself don't want to love those from different races – especially if they smell. I would like enough gospel to make my family secure and my children well behaved, but not so much that I find my ambitions redirected or my giving too greatly enlarged. I would like about three dollars worth of gospel, please.

Today we are given a lovely story of wonder, faith and doubt. We get caught up in the story in a way that means we could easily miss its meaning.

This year we have been systematically reading through Luke's Gospel, and we will continue to do so, but we read from John's Gospel today. It is interesting to make a comparison between Luke and John in their accounts of the resurrection appearance of Jesus in the Upper Room on that first Easter Day.

In Luke's account when Jesus says, "*Peace be with you. They were startled and terrified, and though that they were seeing a ghost.*" [Luke 24.36-37] All the disciples show fear and doubt until Jesus shows them his hands and feet, the places of nail wounds, and says, "*see that it is I myself. Touch me and see.*" [Luke 24.39]

In John's account only Thomas doubts because he was not there on that first Easter Day. Jesus "*showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.*" [John 20.20] It is in their dawning recognition that the disciples recognise Jesus and are glad at his appearance. John omits the ghostly fear that Luke speaks of because he is emphasising the example of discipleship that their recognition gives to the Church.

At the Last Supper, Jesus spoke to the disciples with a promise:

*"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."* [John 14.27]

The promise of the Spirit is tied to the gift of peace. This is more than the customary greeting 'shalom', a polite offering of peace in saying hello. The promise of the Spirit is given

its fulfilment in this resurrection moment and Jesus again says to them, “ *Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘*Receive the Holy Spirit.*’ ” [John 20.21-22] Jesus commissioning them to their task of Apostleship in his name.

Relationship is the key – just as Jesus was sent by the Father so, too, the disciples are now sent by Jesus. Another scholar, William Loader, put it this way:

Jesus offered light and life and truth through relationship with himself, through relationship with God. Our role is also to offer light and life and truth through a relationship with God. This does not equate us and Jesus, but the task is the same.

As Jesus was God’s representative so the disciples had to be ambassadors, envoys who, in keeping with the way people communicated before the days of telecommunication, needed to be able to act for and on behalf of the authority who did the sending. For the disciples it is authority given to them to offer the relationship in which is life.

But Thomas was not there. His doubt speaks to his character. Yes, he comes to faith, but there is ambiguity in him revealed by his demand for proof, his desire for a miracle. Thomas says, “ *Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.*’ ” [John 20.25] Yet, when the moment came and Jesus appeared, spoke to him and offered him the opportunity to touch the wounds, Thomas responds without touching “ *My Lord and my God*’ ” [John 20.28] prompting Jesus response ‘*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*’ [John 20.29]

The challenge in Jesus’ words is to not need such proofs. They are only useful if they lead to the real faith which consists in a relationship with God.

Interestingly, ‘Thomas’ is a Greek name, and it means ‘twin’, though his twin, if he had one, never appears and it never mentioned. This has led some to suggest we are, each of us, his twin.

We remember that in today’s Church we are numbered among the disciples of Jesus and, as such, are also sent by Jesus to be people of a faith that is more than \$3 in our back pocket, rather a faith that encompasses our whole approach to life.

And so, today we are challenged with transformation:

- We are called from indifference and doubt to faith in Jesus.
- We are reminded that we share in the gift of the Spirit of peace
- And we are sent out afresh to be ambassadors of Christ our risen Lord!