

Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Easter 2A

Sunday 16 April 2023

The peace that leaves no one behind

Have you ever felt left out?

It is something we all fear.

There is even an acronym for it - FOMO – fear of missing out.

Children's pester power is partly driven by this fear –

I overheard this week 'Mum I really need that \$60 water bottle everyone else has got one but me. I really, really need it.'

Underneath those words is the power of the words of not wanting to be left out, being different from the crowd.

Imagine what Thomas felt when he missed the biggest event yet – the appearance of the risen Jesus to the disciples – all there except for him.

All the disciples, not just the 12 had been gathered on that Easter Sunday evening with Mary Magdalene's words that she had seen the Lord still ringing in their ears.

Here they are with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders.

So much had happened in such a short time.

No wonder they were scared. Their leader had been crucified but now his tomb was empty and Mary had encountered the risen one.

What were they to make of it?

In the midst of fear and turmoil Jesus appears saying 'Peace be with you'.

Jesus is present to them in their fear and greets them with peace, to reassure them.

They are words of solace which address their fear to calm them. Notice what Jesus doesn't do – he does not tell them off.

Instead he is physically present to them, utters words of peace and reveals himself to them and breathes upon them.

The breath of the Spirit that he handed over with his last breath to God and to humanity is breathed afresh on them.

His breath has not been stopped forever. Death has been unable to hold Jesus - God has raised him to a new vibrant living breathing vitality which he shares with the disciples to set them free and urge them forward.

What it must have felt like for Thomas to hear of all of this and realise what he has missed out on!

His protest is understandable – that he won't believe unless he experiences the reality too.

Thomas is not left out.

Jesus comes again and offers peace to them all again with Thomas there, shows his hands and side just as he did before to the others, calls him to move from unbelieving to believing as the others had and Thomas finds himself transformed.

How often when we reflect on this story do we focus on the doubting Thomas like a tongue that always seeks out the rough place in your teeth.

We are drawn to Thomas and have found something to criticise thinking that he is doubting. Even the translators of the scriptures have fallen into this trap.

The word for doubt is not even used here- the Greek reads literally 'do not be unbelieving but believe'.

The focus of this reading is really on the risen Jesus and the relationship he is calling us too.

Jesus is the one who meets disciples in their fear, who appears as the embodied one with wounds and scars from his trials but is now vibrantly alive and breathing in embodied life.

Here is the one who offers peace, the eternal shalom of God, the depth of peace that lasts even when there is fear and turmoil. Jesus offers peace to all and leaves no one out.

The missing one is offered it as well.

Perhaps the early church community saw themselves in Thomas as those who'd come along later who'd missed out on being eye-witnesses and being in that first locked upper room.

Maybe they identified with Thomas not as the doubting one but the believing one who wasn't left out.

Thomas was the figure through whom those who weren't there could experience the truth that God's peace was also offered to them, that the Risen Jesus said to them and to us 'peace be with you'.

The risen Jesus meets us and calls us to continue the journey of moving from unbelief to belief, from fear to trust, from anxiety trapped behind locked doors to experience the deep living and real peace and presence of the risen Jesus who leaves no one out.

What does it mean for you and for me as we continue to proclaim the Risen one today?

The invitation is there to hear the words peace be with you.

As we hear the words of scripture they are living words that bring Christ alive to us now living and breathing in our midst.

We are called to continue to trust those words even when we are fearful and to feel the breath of the Holy Spirit moving through us to offer peace and light to others.

No one is left out from hearing and experiencing the Easter joy and hope that God in Christ offers us.

The hope and joy of being Easter people moves us from fear to those who offer peace, a peace that is real and that is here now to hold us.

Peace be with you says Jesus.

Peace be with you all, everyone, we are all held in that peace and that living love forever.

Lections:
Acts 2.14a, 22-32
Psalm 16
1 Peter 1.1-12
John 20.19-31

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