

John 20:19-end

After the joy of celebration at Easter, as we continue in this Easter season, we consider the implications of Jesus' Resurrection for us.

In John's gospel, on that first Easter Day, Mary Magdalene came to the empty tomb, and two angels told her that Jesus was risen, before she is the first to meet the risen Jesus; Peter and John rush to the tomb and also find it empty, and in today's gospel reading, in the evening of that same Easter Day, the other disciples first encounter the risen Lord.

Firstly, Jesus reassures his disciples.

'When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.' (v19-20)

The disciples were scared, huddled together behind locked doors, fearful that the authorities might come for them next, no doubt contemplating the events of the past week, and their own failures to stay faithful to Jesus. Jesus offers his peace, and then shows them the wounds in his hands and his side, acknowledging their natural human fears and doubts that he could really be alive. He wants them to be sure that it is him, alive again! All of the disciple's fears melt away, and they are filled with joy as they realise that it is indeed Jesus. Their failures hadn't been final, God's purposes had not been thwarted, Jesus was still with them!

We also need to be convinced that Jesus rose from the dead, to have our doubts answered and our fears calmed, to experience him personally. Because this is our hope for life here and for life eternally. Our experience of the risen Lord is, of course, different to those first disciples, but can be just as real, and is just as necessary.

Secondly, Jesus sends the disciples out.

Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' (v21) After more reassurance, the disciples are sent out. This is John's version of the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's gospel. They were sent to proclaim what they had seen and heard, that Jesus was alive. This is how the Good News spread. We see the pattern of Jesus' life is to be repeated in the disciples, as before when he said, *'deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.'*

There is a **rhythm** to the Christian life of **coming in** and **going out**, like breathing in and out. We **come in** to God, and to the church, to be refreshed, forgiven, blessed, changed, renewed. This can be a weekly rhythm of coming to church, a daily rhythm of prayer, and a moment-by-moment rhythm of turning to God in our daily lives.

We are then **sent** into the world, to live our lives to the glory of God. As I will say at the end of this Holy Communion service, *'Go in the peace of Christ'*.

Some people are more attracted to the coming in to God, and are called to lives of prayer and service within the church, others are more attracted to going out, in evangelism or social action and service of others. We need **both** in all our lives, but we are all different.

Jesus sends the disciples out to witness to what they had heard and seen and experienced. So, we also witness to others, in word and action, of what we have experienced of the living Lord Jesus today. This is our testimony.

Jesus then equips the disciples.

'When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' (v22) This verse is a conscious echo of the words of creation at the beginning of the Bible. Jesus is now beginning his new creation, a new people, filled with his Spirit, who would bring in a new Kingdom. The disciples are sent out after receiving the Spirit afresh, as would happen more widely on the day of Pentecost. They could not do this on their own, but only in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We go, trusting in God, and not in our own strength.

We cannot change the world, but **God** can change the world, little by little, through us.

We cannot build the church, but **God** builds his church through our prayers and actions, our lives dedicated to his service.

Let us, like those first disciples, also be convinced of the truth of Jesus' resurrection, and as we are sent into the world to witness to him, let us seek to live our lives in the strength of God's Spirit.