

John 20: 19 to 31 9.30 am

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer Amen.

Our reading from John's gospel is a snapshot of history because it was written by St John who was there when Jesus entered the upper room of the house, where they had in all probability, previously celebrated the last supper.

The reason I say that they were in the same place is because the disciples had only been in Jerusalem a few days, and in all probability knew of no where else to go, and they also knew it was relatively safe, because Jesus had chosen it in the first place.

They locked themselves in, because while the authorities had managed to capture Jesus, the leader of the religious movement, they knew that as Jesus' followers, their lives were also in mortal danger.

They were probably terrified of what was going to happen to them, directly they showed themselves, which they knew they would have to do in order to get food, but then when evening came Jesus stood among them.

Now before they panicked at his mysterious entry he said, "Peace be with you". When Jesus said "Peace be with you" or "Shalom" Jesus meant much more than a single word could express.

He meant the absence of agitation or discord, he meant be healthy be safe and much more. "Peace be with you" in this context was probably Jesus forgiving them for running away and hiding themselves rather than staying with him when he needed them most.

Then Jesus showed them his hands and his side and now, where there was once disbelief, there was now joy at seeing the Lord.

But with the joy I'm sure there was still some confusion because dead people do not come back to life, but then Jesus said again, "Peace be with you", but then he added, "As the Father sent me, so I send you".

This was effectively the birth of the Christian church which is the body of Christ, It is also our commission to tell the Good News of Christ to the ends of the earth,

Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit".

Now there was no confusion or disbelief left, because now through the Holy Spirit everything became crystal clear to them.

It is not through human intellect, that we know that Jesus died and rose again, it is through faith and in the Holy Spirit dwelling in us telling us that Jesus rose from the dead, it is also through the power of the Holy Spirit that we have the courage to tell other people.

So, as at the beginning of Jesus' ministry when God sent the Holy Spirit on to him so that he could go out in the power of the Holy Spirit; so now Jesus breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit, so they too, could start their ministry of telling people about the Good News of Christ.

Now Jesus' commission applies to all of us who are baptised Christians, and who, in consequence, have received the Holy Spirit.

The important thing is to step out in faith and leave the rest to God, who will give us all that we need to complete his work, and then we too will be a blessing to the Christian fellowship here at St Michael's and to the community that we live in.

And then Jesus added, "If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven".

This does not mean that we have the power to forgive or not to forgive sins, only God can do that; so what did Jesus mean?

The first thing to grasp is that to be forgiven is to be released from the burden of sin, which can only happen through Christ. So to release people from sin we are to tell them about the good news of the gospel of Christ.

If they accept the gospel then it is possible for them to be released from the burden of sin, but if they reject the gospel then they have rejected that possibility.

The core of the gospel message is that sins are forgiven by God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who hear the gospel message, and believe it and have faith in the redeeming power of God their sins are forgiven through repentance; those who hear the message but reject it, their sins and that sin of rejection will not be forgiven until there is a change of heart.

We also need to remember that as we forgive those who sin against us, so our Father in heaven forgives us, and it is in our forgiving others that we shall one day enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

We are then told in verse 24 that Thomas, one of the disciples wasn't in the room when Jesus appeared to them, and when Thomas eventually caught up with the rest of the disciples they crowded around him to tell him the good news of the resurrection of Jesus, but Thomas said that if he didn't see with his own eyes he would not believe.

I think that Thomas' reaction was quite reasonable, if a group of my friends told me that one of our friends who had died and whose funeral we had attended had been seen I would say that it is obvious that the person you saw looked like him but clearly wasn't because we attended his funeral.

I also detect a bit of resentment in those words from Thomas, and that he was really upset with himself for not being there, or possibly more accurately of being excluded, even though it was his own fault for not staying close to his friends.

So here is a lesson for all of us that if we really want to get to know Jesus and what is happening in the Christian fellowship then we need to keep in regular contact with each other.

We are then told in verse 26 that a week later they were **again** in the house that word '**again**' is significant.

Something had clearly happened to them since we first encountered them in the house.

If you remember the first time we heard that they were in the house they had locked and bolted themselves in for fear of the Jews.

But now they had been outside, we know that because we are told that 'later they were **again** in the house' so they had been outside and they had come back, and not only had they been out but now the door was only shut, it wasn't locked or bolted.

Where now was their fear of the Jews? Had the Jews suddenly changed? No they hadn't! It was the disciples who had changed.

They were no longer frightened of the Jews, because Jesus had filled them with the power of the Holy Spirit; being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit had changed them.

They may well still have been in danger when they went out, but that didn't matter to them any more, what mattered to them was going out and telling other people about the Good News of Christ.

It was their confidence in the Lord that was protecting them.

They were no longer frightened, they walked with their heads held high not looking back, and preaching the Good News of

Christ and people were listening to them, because they were now speaking with authority.

And then we heard how Jesus again entered the house and said, "Peace be with you" and then turning to Thomas he said put your fingers here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side, do not doubt but believe.

Thomas was so overcome with joy and wonder that he had no need to touch Jesus, and all that he could do or say was, "My Lord and my God".

Thomas' other virtue was that when he wasn't sure he was brave enough to say so, but when he was sure, he went the whole way.

There was no half way house about Thomas, when Jesus stood in front of him and showed him his wounds Thomas' certainty was complete.

When a person fights his way through his doubts and unbelief to the conviction that Jesus is his Lord and his God he has attained a certainty that cannot be shaken and that's just as true today as it has ever been.

Thomas was now convinced that not only had Jesus been raised from the dead but that he had recognised God in the miracle that had obviously occurred.

Jesus said to him "have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe".

These last words sum up our situation. The disciples may not have needed faith in the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead because they had seen him raised, but we have to accept that Jesus rose from the dead through faith as we do for all aspects of Jesus' life.

And while our faith initially may well have been based on what our parents told us when we were children, the foundations of our faith can be strengthened by reading the Bible, by observing the traditions of the church, and on our experience of Jesus in our own lives.

And most of these facets of learning come from a close relationship with fellow Christians at social events run by the church, at house groups and at church services so we all need to keep in touch with each other if we are to grow in faith.

As we sit let us pray for our own journey of faith

You came, Lord Jesus Christ to show us the true nature of God, to teach us the way of life that you require, to show us how we are to serve you and our neighbours.

Keep us close to you and make us receptive to your teaching and to your gospel, and help us to live a life of service to you, without counting the cost, to the glory of your name.

Amen