

### **The Sunday after Easter. 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

*John 20;* <sup>19</sup> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **'Peace be with you!'** <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. **The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.**

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, **'My Lord and my God!'**

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, **'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'**

<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> **But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

This Easter I have found myself drawn to John's account of these events, and I've found some parts of his narrative very poignant, which for me have spoken into our current, strange situation. Perhaps the most poignant have been the references to the disciples being gathered together away from others. Of these, for me at least, the most significant of these is found in the scripture verses we are considering just now.

In John 20:19 we read that they were behind locked doors because they were afraid! In that moment their fear was of the Jewish authorities. They were known as followers of Jesus, and as we know so well, Jesus had been put to death by Rome, ably abetted by the Jewish religious leaders. The disciples were recognisable as they had previously made no secret of their affiliation to Jesus. Of course they were afraid! He was gone, they were left, and maybe it would be their turn next!

When Jesus came into their locked room that Resurrection Day, we read that they were overjoyed, and that he gave to them his peace. He breathed new life into them, new hope, new purpose. But as we know, Thomas was not with them on that occasion. I do think it sad that he is forever known as "Doubting Thomas" as I'm pretty sure that any one of the other disciples (and me too in that situation) would have been just the same.

A week later we read, in that same place, presumably still locked away together (still fearful, still uncertain?) Jesus came to them again and this time Thomas was there. I doubt very much if Thomas took Jesus's suggestions of touching his wounds, because he wouldn't need to. All we read is that Thomas instantly recognised Jesus, saying "My Lord, and my God".

<https://youtu.be/y5VutCGsVXE> King of Kings, Majesty.

King of Kings, majesty,  
God of Heaven living in me,  
Gentle Saviour, closest friend,  
Strong Deliverer,  
beginning and end:  
All within me falls at your throne.

Earth and Heaven worship you,  
Love eternal, faithful and true,  
Who bought the nations,  
ransomed souls,  
Brought this sinner here to your throne:  
All within me cries out in praise.

*Your majesty, I can but bow;  
I lay my all before you now.  
In royal robes I don't deserve,  
I live to serve your majesty.*

*Your majesty, I can but bow;  
I lay my all before you now.  
In royal robes I don't deserve,  
I live to serve your majesty.*

I wonder if you perhaps have a sense of what God might be saying to you, to us, in our present day through these few verses from John's gospel?

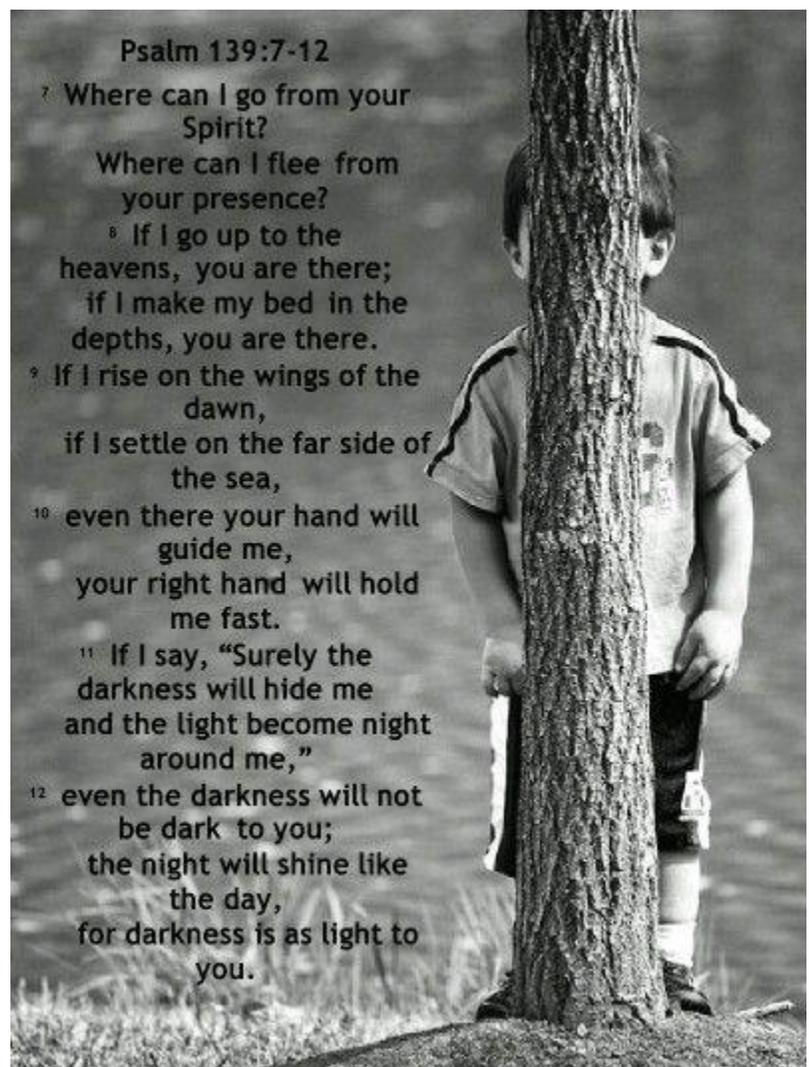
As you have read the verses, perhaps in your mind revisiting the Easter story from last weekend, has God spoken to you about how things are for us just now? I know he has to me.

Few of us are able to gather at the moment, except through technology of some kind or another, whether it be phone calls, or through the internet, or even the printed word. Those who can gather are in very small family groups who happen to share the same home, because we know we can't even meet together with our families unless that is the case. That's hard, and perhaps you have been in a situation over these past few weeks, or you anticipate it may be so, when you would have shared together either at church, or with your family and friends, and you know that for the foreseeable future you won't be able to.

We can possibly identify more than any other year with the disciples who were in a small group in a safe place and who were afraid to go out and face the world. Their fears are not ours; our fears, or concerns are due to a virus, something we can't see, and our desire to stay well and not to pass anything to someone else who may become ill. Acknowledging the difference, we can grasp something of the need to stay in one place, in order to remain safe.

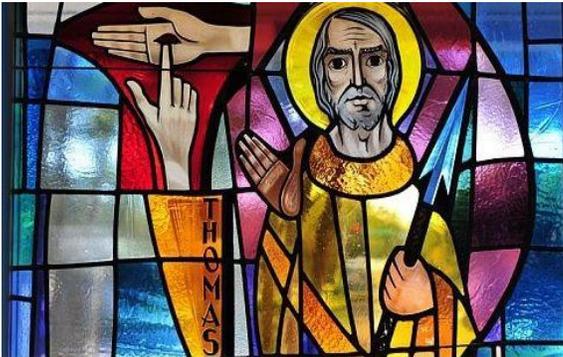
**Just what does our scripture reading say to us, today, in our place of safety?**

It reminds us that there is nowhere we can go or be where God is not present. As Jesus was able to enter the locked room, so God is with us at every moment. The Psalmist in what for many is a favourite Psalm also strongly reminds us of that truth.



It reminds us that we can have joy and peace and purpose when we have faith in the Risen Lord. We read that the disciples were overjoyed, and that Jesus granted them his peace. He also gave them a purpose to move forward back into the world with, as he breathed his Holy Spirit into them.

It reminds us that there will still be those times of doubt, even when we are in relationship with him – the disciples were after all if you recall, still gathering together in a similar way a week after Jesus first came to them, but this time Thomas was with them. Was that in part because they were still afraid, still uncertain if the time was right for them to move into the next phase of their lives? In a few more weeks we will celebrate Pentecost, and we know that Jesus had told the disciples to wait for that time when they would be fully resourced and empowered to face the world – does that also remind us that we must wait for our time to move out from where we are in a safe place?



I love the thought that when Thomas saw Jesus for himself, he had no need of any kind of proof other than seeing him. Maybe he did touch the wounds, but scripture doesn't say that – only that it was ok with Jesus if he did. His response seems to me to be immediate as he bowed before his Lord acknowledging him for who he was.

This reminds us that when we come ourselves before the Risen Jesus in faith, speaking his name in our hearts if not with our lips, we also recognise him for who he is and our lives change as we sense his love, his power, his joy and his peace filling us.

<https://youtu.be/azlhQQVx8qY> Jesus, what a beautiful name!

Jesus, what a beautiful name,  
 Son of God,  
 Son of Man,  
 Lamb that was slain.  
 Joy and peace,  
 Strength and hope,  
 Grace that blows all fear  
 away.  
 Jesus, what a beautiful name.

Jesus, what a beautiful name,  
 Truth revealed,  
 my future sealed,  
 Healed my pain.  
 Love and freedom,  
 Life and warmth,  
 Grace that blows all fear  
 away.  
 Jesus, what a beautiful name.

Jesus, what a beautiful name,  
 Rescued my soul,  
 my stronghold,  
 Lifts me from shame,  
 Forgiveness, security,  
 Power and love,  
 Grace that blows all fear  
 away.  
 Jesus, what a beautiful name.

Perhaps one of the greatest reminders is that we are in this day and age “Blessed!” We are blessed because we are numbered amongst the people who Jesus was speaking of when he said to Thomas *‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’* And we are blessed because we have taken notice of the further truth that *‘Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that (because we have believed) we have life in his name.’* (words in brackets are mine!)

**“In Christ alone my hope is found..... Here in the power of Christ I stand!”**

<https://youtu.be/Ry4CW5pte98> In Christ alone.

In Christ alone my hope is found;  
He is my light, my strength, my song;  
This cornerstone, this solid ground,  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace,  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
My comforter, my all in all  
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

There in the ground His body lay,  
Light of the world by darkness slain;  
Then bursting forth in glorious day,  
Up from the grave He rose again!  
And as He stands in victory,  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me;  
For I am His and He is mine  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

In Christ alone, who took on flesh,  
Fullness of God in helpless babe!  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
Scorned by the ones He came to save.  
Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied  
For every sin on Him was laid;  
Here in the death of Christ I live.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
This is the power of Christ in me;  
From life's first cry to final breath,  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
Can ever pluck me from His hand;  
Till He returns or calls me home,  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

### **A Prayer,**

*God of all hope we call on you today.  
We pray for those who are living in fear:  
Fear of illness, fear for loved ones, fear of other's reactions to them.  
May your Spirit give us a sense of calmness and peace.*

*We pray for your church in this time of uncertainty.  
For those people who are worried about attending worship.  
For those needing to make decisions in order to care for others  
For those who will feel more isolated by not being able to attend.  
Grant us your wisdom.*

*Holy God, we remember that you have promised that  
Nothing will separate us from your love - demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ.  
Help us turn our eyes, hearts and minds to you.*

*We thank you for your word which assures us of your constant presence, which  
reminds us of joy and hope and peace even in this troubled time. May we be your  
people in this time, reaching out with love and faith, calling upon your name and  
knowing that even in these times we are blessed because we know you. Help us to  
share that with others.*

*Amen*