

## A Sermon for the Second Sunday in Easter

We are at the beginning of Eastertide, and to a certain extent, we, like the disciples, are learning just what the resurrection of Christ fully means. It is a journey of discovery that draws us closer to God, and shows us the depth of God's love for us.

Discovery is at the heart of the interaction between Jesus and the disciples in the Gospel passage of the day. The disciples are hiding, in fear. They've been shocked and distressed by everything that has happened, and are taking some time to figure out what they should do. Part of this includes assessing what kind of danger they may be facing from the authorities. The stakes were real, and their caution is necessary.

In the midst of this confusion and fear, in steps Jesus. Jesus greets them with words of peace. I can only begin to imagine their delight when they realised who was speaking to them, and to hear those words of reassurance. And then he shows them his wounds. This proves who he is, and everything that happened. It was part of the way that Jesus made sure they were ready to hear what he had to say, and to commission them for their ongoing work.

From their huddle in the room, locked away to protect themselves, Jesus sends them out. "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you ..." he says to them. And then he equips them for their work. "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

While we might see this as a commissioning of those specific individuals for their work in the early Church, we can also draw some universal lessons about the nature of Christian faith. We are all people who are sent to reflect the love of God, and to show that love through our words and actions. We are sent into the world to make the world a more Godly and more blessed place. That is an important task for all of us, and may God help us in the work.

Then there is the discussion of forgiveness of sins. While the clergy have a specific task in offering formal absolution for sins, either communally or individually, there is also something universal we can draw from it: each of us are called to be a person of forgiveness. Every single one of us is called to be someone who is willing to forgive those who have wronged them, and to ask for forgiveness when it is necessary. It is not easy, it takes much work of heart and mind to be ready to do this, but is it crucially important. As I have said before, none of us are perfect. Nobody, however well intentioned, lives a wholly blameless life. There will be times when each of us need to atone, or are asked to grant forgiveness by someone who feels they have wronged us.

We need to be humble enough to ask for that forgiveness, and gracious enough to offer it if we can.

And then, in our Gospel, there is Thomas. He wasn't with them when Jesus spoke with them, and he comes and hears from them, "We have seen the Lord". I sympathise with Thomas, missing out on seeing the risen Christ and hearing him speak. The disappointment would have been almost overwhelming, and their words would have seemed incredible. No wonder Thomas wanted to see what they saw, and to even go so far as to touch them to know for certain that Jesus was real and present and tangible. Labelling him "Doubting Thomas" seems a little harsh in response, but that is what many have called him ever since.

One week later, Thomas' wish is granted in full. Jesus greets them with the same words, "Peace be with you". He invites Thomas to touch him, and says, "Do not doubt but believe". Thomas responds with some extraordinary words that proclaim his belief: "My Lord and my God!". I don't think he could have found finer words to respond to Jesus in that moment, or a clearer declaration of his faith.

I imagine Jesus' subsequent reply to Thomas be spoken with a kind of wry smile and a gentle wisdom. When Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe", I do not think he is categorically rebuking Thomas, but rather reassuring those who will never have the chance that he and the other disciples had of seeing Jesus in the flesh. They are words for us, now, encouraging us in our faith, and offering us hope.

In the conclusion of the passage, we are told that the very Gospel we have read (or are listening to), was written "so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name". All of this is done in the name of faith, in the hope that it inspires us in believing, and in the living of our faith.

As Easter people, may we take that inspiration and use it. May we live each day with the hope Jesus gives us, and use it to lighten the world to the glory of God, and the encouragement of each other.

Rev. Dr Emily Fraser  
All Saints, South Hobart, and St Raphael's, Fern Tree  
The Second Sunday in Easter  
27 April 2025