**Sermon for Sunday 11th April 2021 10am**

**Readings:-**

**Acts 4:32-35**

**John 20:19-end**

**Theme:- How to deal with our doubts**

**Prayer:-**

***May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever pleasing in your sight O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer***

***Amen***

**Introduction- I don’t know about you but I can sometimes find it very hard to make a decision!**

It could be as simple as deciding what to wear, or it could be a huge decision about whether to move house!!!

I have a friend who finds it hard to make any decisions – large or small. She would acknowledge this herself!

I have known her reserve a carpet in a shop for weeks on end while she tries to make up her mind!

**On the face of it our Gospel reading seems to be all about doubt!**

Jesus appears to his disciples, after the resurrection, as they cower in fear in a locked room.

What a miracle that must have seemed. The door to the room was locked, as the disciples were in fear of their lives, yet Jesus appeared amongst them – apparently passing through a solid door or wall – and showed them the wounds on his hands and side which he had sustained in his crucifixion.

What an enormous shock that must have been.

We hear that those present were ‘overjoyed’ so presumably had no trouble recognising Jesus for who he is, greeting him accordingly. It must have been an electrifying moment.

Not so for one disciple, who was not present at that first visitation. He is the one who will ever be known as ‘doubting’ Thomas because of his scepticism when told, by the others, of this miraculous appearance of Jesus. He wants certainty and refused to be convinced unless he could see Jesus for himself and actually touch his wounds.

Well – he does get his chance, as Jesus appears again in similar circumstances, a week later. This time Thomas was present and Jesus, knowing his doubts, was able to say to him:-

***‘Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe’*** We can only imagine Thomas reaching out a trembling hand – then falling to his knees in awe as he gasps out the words ***‘My lord and my God’***

**Is this then the whole point of the story? I think not…**

**We hear in the initial visitation that Jesus also breathed the Holy Spirit on the disciples. –A hugely significant act.**

Jesus goes on to say that the disciples will have authority to forgive sins.

**So what’s that all about?**

**Jesus was not just making a social call** – although his appearance was bound to be a huge relief and comfort to the disciples. **He was also there to encourage and empower them to take action**. Jesus himself was no longer in this world and he was empowering his disciples to physically carry on with his ministry for him.

He could not have made it more clear for he says:-

***‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’***

**Gosh! What a commission.** I wonder if the disciples were able to take it all in!!

**So - maybe Thomas was the most grounded and sensible one of them after all?**

We tend to think of Thomas as a bit of a weak character and a ‘stick in the mud’. Hiding somewhere away from view when Jesus first appeared and then later demanding physical proof of the Resurrection. **Couldn’t he take the word of his friends?**

Yet – as William Barclay points out, there is another explanation. Thomas perhaps fully understood the implication of the cross more than most. Previously, when Jesus proposed going to Bethany, on hearing of the illness of Lazarus, Thomas reacted by saying:-

***‘Let us also go, that we may die with him’ (John 11:16)*** So Thomas obviously displayed courage and loved Jesus enough to be willing to go to Jerusalem and die with him while the other disciples were hesitant and afraid.

**When what he expected actually happened** – Thomas was so broken hearted, that he was not necessarily hiding in fear but went to be alone with his grief – so missing the first visitation.

**Also, most significantly, Thomas was the one who recognised Jesus to be none other than God himself! When he declared:-**

***‘My Lord and (also) my God’***

**So what are the implications for us? I think that this passage is meant for us today just as much as it was for the disciples all those years ago.**

**Jesus is commissioning all of his followers to carry on with his ministry and show the love of God to the world!!!**

**But – Like Thomas do we have doubts too?**

**Obviously, we are not able to physically see and touch Jesus today.**

**Jesus himself commends those who believe without seeing:-**

***‘Blessed are those who have not seen and who have believed’***

**What sort of chance have we got then?**

I do think that Jesus expects us to have doubts. After all as Rev Mike was saying last week being uncertain is all part of the human condition. As Jesus is also part human he has entered into our condition and understands.

In fact we know that Jesus himself was beset by doubts and fears before the crucifixion. We hear in Mark’s Gospel that he prayed to his Father on the Mount of Olives, just before his arrest:-

***‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done’***

We hear that:-

***An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.***

***(Luke 22:42-44)***

So Jesus knows what it is to doubt and what it is to suffer. Yet, crucially he trusts in his Father and is obedient to His will.

**So - how are we expected to cope?**

I would submit by following the example of Jesus by:-

* By developing a relationship with God and spending time each day in prayer.
* Keeping in touch with, and drawing strength from the Church Christian community, being the ‘body of Christ’
* By being honest with God. Thomas was not afraid to voice his doubts and was reassured
* By choosing to put God first and to keep Him there.
* By accepting that there are no absolute certainties in this life and that we are not able to understand fully or prove anything absolutely.

Some of us have been reading a book by Alister McGrath called ‘Through a Glass Darkly’

In the book he explains that he started life as a scientist believing that scientific laws were the answer to everything and that religious beliefs were just wishful thinking.

However – he came to realise that scientific laws were not permanent. As time passes and research progresses so previously thought of ‘proven truths’ were to be continually replaced by other theories/laws.

He recognised, therefore, that nothing on this earth can be proved with absolute certainty and that we all have to live with that realisation.

He turned from atheism to become a theologian and has accepted that we can never know everything in this world. We see imperfectly ‘Through a Glass Darkly’ (1Cor.13:12)

God’s ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8)

Rev Mike said last week that many scientists, in the past, have been known to set out with confidence to try to prove that God is a myth only to either come to a belief in God themselves or give up because they could not ‘prove’ otherwise.

**So – how do we live with uncertainty?**

We are experiencing a very difficult time, at the moment, as a result of this Pandemic – but who knows - something good might come of it in future? A reassessment of our priorities perhaps?

I was watching a TV programme last week about the presenter Matt Baker and his family. He comes from farming stock and has his own farm. His mother, a shepherdess, has recently suffered a serious accident managing a large sheep (yes really!) on her farm in Northumberland. Matt and family are spending time there helping out and suggesting ways forward for the future. They have a family conflab when Matt suggests that his mother sell all her beloved large sheep in favour of smaller breeds which are easier to manage. This is hard as the flock have taken years of hard work and breeding to build up.

His mum is tearful but then smiles bravely and agrees this is the way forward – adding – who knows but this new venture may well prove to be a blessing in the future!

**Our reading from Acts I think also gives us direction:-**

We hear that all the believers were ***‘of one heart and mind’.*** They shared what possessions they had. They testified to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus and provided for those in need.

Put simply Jesus has said :-

***‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ (Matt.22:39***

**Surely we can’t go wrong doing just that?**

**Prayer to finish:-**

Risen Lord, after your resurrection you came to your disciples through closed doors. May the doors of our hearts always be pen to you that we may know your guidance and companionship as we continue on our Christian pilgrimage.

**Amen**