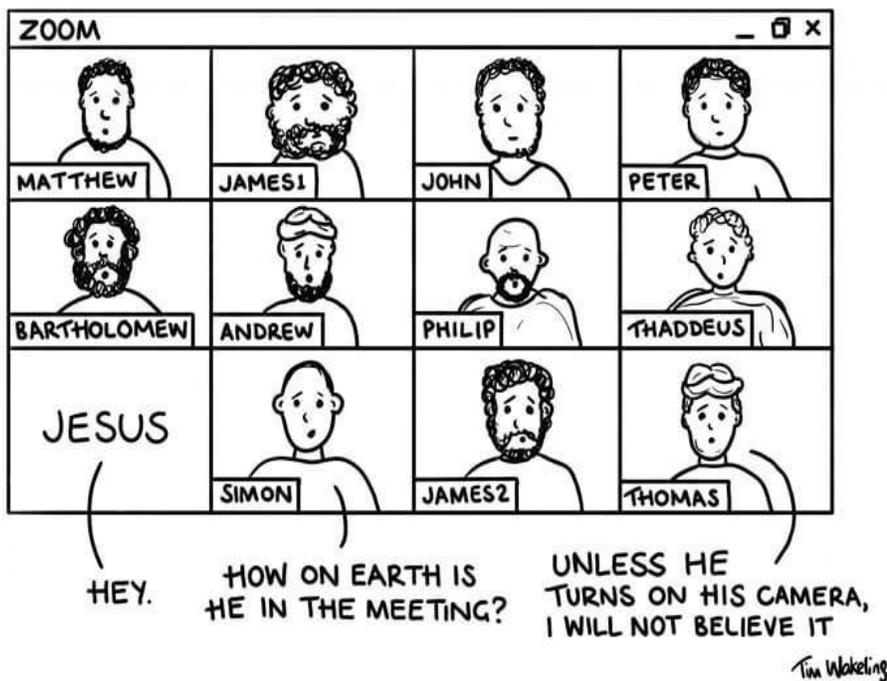


Second Sunday of Easter 2020
St. Margaret of Antioch
The Revd Fr. David Wylie RN
Acts 2;42-47, 1 Peter 1;3-9, Gospel of John 20:19-31

Thomas has always been one of my favourite Disciples. It may have something to do with the fact that his feast day is the day before my birthday or that I first celebrated mass on his feast day July 3rd – 27 years ago. I find much of the art involving Thomas a bit annoying – it usually shows Thomas sticking his hand in the wounds of Christ – which is of course not biblical. He may have said “unless I can see and touch I will not believe” but he refrained from the invitation by the risen Christ to do so and declares “My Lord and My God”. Known as the doubter, he proclaims the earliest of creeds and statement of belief. There is a physicality to the earliest of resurrection appearances and yet Jesus says to Thomas blessed are those have not seen and yet believe. A work of art – well a cartoon, has popped up that I do quite like and seems appropriate for the current climate. It involves ZOOM. Let me describe it.

There are 12 screens but only 11 faces – the eleven remaining disciples. A hello comes from the blank screen – Recognised as Jesus from Thomas comes the line “unless he turns on his camera I will not believe it”.



I introduced the idea last week on Easter Day that belief is less about knowing, in the sense of facts, than relationship. The etymology of the word belief in English is centred on love and trust rather than knowledge. Knowledge is important but it is not everything. The disciples grew in their knowledge of the God through their relationship with Jesus as we do. His resurrection brought about a change, not so much in their

“knowledge” of who God is but how he reveals himself and how he calls us to be in relationship with him, each other and his world. That is why the apostles in their preaching and teaching always refer to the God of Abraham and of the prophets - there is no new God but a powerful new relationship. Relationship is everything. It brings new light to what they thought they knew. The power of their growing relationship with each other and with the risen Christ began to sweep aside not just doubt but fear – fear of all enemies including death.

“The doors were closed for fear of the Jews” – they were meeting in secret. In a sense the doors of the church would be closed for 300 years not just a few weeks. And yet how it grew! The Church grew with amazing speed and increasing confidence in the face of its enemies and not just human ones. It is pertinent to remember that in the latter part of the third century, Rome was afflicted with a plague – 5000 died a day in Rome in a city of maybe a million. Unsurprisingly people deserted but Christians and clergy refused and continued their ministries. Historians recognise how it undoubtedly laid the foundations for many more converts.

This group looked different and did things differently. They seemed to hold out different values in a world where life was brutal and often short. Look at the Acts of the Apostles – “they lived together and owned everything in common, they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed”. Now it is true that many societies in our world have inherited and ingested many such Christian principles. However, divorced from relationship with God, through prayer and worship, the old self and old order will always creep back.

Society’s priorities and values have undoubtedly been changed over the last few weeks. The Easter message is that for this to last it cannot be a siege safety behind closed doors – the risen Christ appears to them through the closed doors. Christ’s greeting is “peace be with you.” That peace was not an earthly material peace merely content with a better allocation of resources and things however worthy that may be. This deeper and eternal peace with each other, with the world, with God are all to do with being in right relationship. Christ’s presence brings peace even in the midst of turmoil and fear. Christ’s presence gives courage to open closed doors and see that true peace depends on right relationship with God, his people and world.

Those first disciples and the early Church were faithful in *prayer* in *worship* **and** in *pastoral care* – do we need to look further to see our strategy not just for a lockdown but for the release too. I think not. Thomas was impulsive enough to offer to die with Jesus on his way to Bethany without knowing what he was really saying. After his encounter with the risen Christ through those closed doors he would go out through them himself to distant parts of the world. He may never have seen Christ again but so strong was his relationship with Him that he was able to lead a life of courage and faith.

It was not peaceful in an earthly sense, he did give his life, but in sharing faith not just things, it brought a peace that the world cannot give.

Today, as our Orthodox cousins celebrate Easter many will thank God for Thomas and share his creed – My Lord and My God - and indeed in spirit will join hands and say ***Our*** Lord and ***Our*** God. No Zoom, Facebook or any social media however useful has the power to do this. May the risen Christ this Easter season bring you into a new relationship with God, his world and people and bring you a true and lasting peace.

Amen.