

Easter 2 Year C 2019

I have never found any reference in theological tomes, but it seems to me that the final verses of our Gospel reading on this Low Sunday, should be taken in context with the verse which closes the next (and final) chapter of John's Gospel. Whenever I read or hear either, I find them poignant and moving. There has been speculation that originally the Gospel ended at the end of Chapter 20, 21 being a slightly later addition. Certainly, there is a lovely sense of conclusion to Chapter 20 but so too there is to Chapter 21! It's almost as if John doesn't want the story to end, and makes this known in what seems a clear link between both chapters' final verses:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. 20: 30-31

There are many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. 21: 25

I think that in these beautiful verses, John wants us to understand two things.

First, he wants us to know that the Good News of Jesus Christ is not to be read once and put aside, but constantly reread and studied in order to allow ourselves to be led on a life-long journey of continual exploration of faith and growth in the Spirit. Through our interaction with the life, words and deeds of Jesus presented by all four Gospel writers, we engage with the knowledge that in him is to be found our exemplar of understanding the divine compassion, mercy and love which is the heart of the living God. In constant engagement with the Scriptures, we are offered the possibility of endless riches of grace.

Secondly, the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its wider sense is not a closed book with an ending. When John refers to the world being unable to contain the number of books that would have to be written, he leads us to the knowledge that we and all Christians are called to continually write the Gospel mystery of God's love by following Jesus through our lives and actions. We are called to be the Gospel writers of our time through showing God's mercy and compassion in all that we do. In doing so, we reveal true Easter lives; powerful signs of the Resurrection Life Jesus calls us to.

If this sounds like a clarion call, it is meant to! I do not underestimate the challenging times we live in, particularly for people of faith, and **most** particularly for Christians around the world. The barbarous acts in Sri Lanka against the Christian minority and tourists (almost certainly perceived by the perpetrators as people from the Christian West), will leave us with a sense of the wickedness and twisted nature to which all can sink, no matter from what political or religious faction. However, both within our nation and those across the West, the way in which politicians and commentators will not name or address the restriction and persecution of Christians across the world is shameful and itself creates more resentment. The dialogue and understanding between different religions or ideologies

is a blessing to humanity, but this should not be uncritical (although always said with love), because the present situation is leading people to be more fearful and giving rise to resentment.

Consider the contrast between the disciples gathered behind locked doors on that first Easter Day, fearful and frightened, until they become part of the Resurrection story themselves. Jesus appears and reassures them of the peace to be found in him in his repeated words *'Peace be with you,'* before he sends them out into the world. This is our call. We are to open the doors of our hearts, to break down our fears and inhibitions; to heed Jesus' call to go forth, *'As the Father has sent me, so I send you'* ; enabling others to experience God's compassion and mercy through our interactions with them.

In drawing others to this peace, we too find our true peace. Enabling people to experience the Lord's presence through revealing his compassion, in seeking to share their joys and sorrows and offering the healing balm of God's love to their wounds (sometimes through revealing our own), we pray that they too may come to say of Jesus, *'My Lord and my God.'*

Our vocation to be living Gospels is made in the knowledge that God is always with us. No matter what we are experiencing or dealing with, Jesus has gone before, and has trampled down darkness to reveal we are never alone on our journey. The joy and peace the disciples experience is ours as well, as is the call to selflessly touch other people's lives with the understanding of God's compassion and mercy. Let us do so, in the knowledge that indeed the world could never contain the number of books could be written about the immensity of God's Love revealed as it is through the selfless death and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is our story, our Faith - the greatest gift to humanity and to the whole of creation.

Alleluia! The Lord is risen!



The Incredulity of Thomas – Matthias Stom or Matthias Stomer c. 1600 – after 1652

Acts 5:27-32

²⁷ When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,^[a] yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us.' ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than any human authority.'^[b] ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, so that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.'

Revelation I: 4-8

⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed^[a] us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and made^[b] us to be a kingdom, priests serving^[c] his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

⁷ Look! He is coming with the clouds;

every eye will see him,

even those who pierced him;

and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.

So it is to be. Amen.

⁸ 'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

John 20: 19-end

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin^[c]), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.'

²⁸ Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹ 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.'

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.