

# **Sermon for 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter**

**19 April 2020**

**Oxton St Saviour**

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Good morning. It's good to be with you on this Sunday morning, the Second Sunday of Easter.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this time together. And on this Sunday morning, we

thank you for the life-giving death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask you bless us this day and to make us a blessing for others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm going to read to you from Chapter 20 of St John's Gospel. Perhaps after this message, you might wish to go and read through chapter 20 on your own, and to allow what you read to be a basis for your own prayers.

From St John's Gospel, chapter 20.

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.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. [...]

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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.”

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.” 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.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”<sup>1</sup>

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

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Last Sunday, Easter Sunday, we read St John's account of what happened on the morning of the first Easter Day.

Mary Magdalen gets up before dawn, and she walks through the streets of Jerusalem. As she approaches the tomb of Jesus, in the half-light, she sees that the stone covering the tomb had been rolled away, and she runs back to the house to tell the others that someone has robbed Jesus' grave.

In the adrenalin rush which follows, two disciples – Peter and the disciple Jesus loved – run to the tomb. Peter sees the empty tomb and doesn't know what to make of it. But this other, unnamed disciple sees the empty tomb, and immediately he believes that Jesus has risen from the dead.

The two men go home before someone arrests them. Mary stays behind. She's sobbing; and, seeing a gardener, she accuses

him of having dumped the body of Jesus. But then the supposed-gardener speaks her name. “Mary,” he says. And she recognizes that it is Jesus.

In a moment of pure joy, Mary throws her arms around Jesus. But at length, Jesus gently pulls her away. “Don’t keep holding on to me,” he says, “for I have not yet ascended to the Father.”

What Jesus is saying is this: I shall be going away soon, Mary, to sit at the right hand of the Father. And there are other things we both need to do in this precious period before I leave. Go and tell my brothers, Jesus says. You go and tell my brothers that I am not to be found among the dead; I have risen and am going to take my place in glory at the right hand of the Father.

Mary goes. She tells the other disciples, and doubtless they spend the day in some animated discussion. Could it be that Jesus had risen as he promised he would? Some believe; some doubt.

Then, in the evening of that same day (that is, Easter Sunday), Jesus came and stood among the disciples.

He said to them, “Peace be with you”, and showed them [his wounds]. Then

the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, “Peace be with you.”

But one of the disciples was been missing when Jesus came. Thomas.

Thomas had long ago reconciled himself to the idea that they would all die with Jesus.

When Jesus had proposed going up to Jerusalem for the final time, it was Thomas

who said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

When Mary came with her story about Jesus haven risen from the death, Thomas felt he’d heard enough. If the others wanted to hide out in fear, and believe stories of the wounded bodies rising from the grave...

Well, he intended neither to hide nor to indulge Mary’s story. Even when the other disciples tell him that, in his absence, they

too have seen Jesus, Thomas refuses to believe them. He will not believe that Jesus lives, he says, unless he too sees Jesus as they have, and touched Jesus as Mary has.

One week later, it says – that is, the next Sunday, this Sunday – Jesus appears again in the same room in Jerusalem where the disciples are hiding out. Again the door is locked. This time Thomas is with them. Jesus speaks directly to Thomas. “Do not

disbelieve but believe!” And Thomas falls to his knees, addressing Jesus as “My Lord and my God.”

What can we learn from this story?

We can learn from Jesus’ famous command to Mary. “Don’t keep clinging onto me. Go and tell the others the good news”. And that’s an important lesson for all of us – for the whole Church and for each one of us.

Yes, God wants us to cling to him, to

worship him, to say our prayers and read our Bibles. Yes, absolutely. And most of us don’t give nearly enough time to those things.

But what Jesus is saying here is that after we’ve done those things, we need to go and do something else – we need to share the good news of Easter with other people. Jesus told Mary that she ought to sacrifice what

she wanted so that others would come to believe.

And secondly, there's Doubting Thomas. In some translations of the Bible, Jesus says to Thomas, "Do not doubt but believe." Indeed, these are the words I read to you a few minutes ago.

But that's not what Jesus said. No. Jesus said to Thomas, "Do not disbelieve but believe." – and that's very different.

It is likely that when Mary told the others that she had seen the Lord, they doubted her. Perhaps – they must have thought – perhaps she was simply overcome with grief.

But Thomas went further. He positively disbelieved her; and then he disbelieved them all. Doubt is often part of belief, even in mundane matters. But Thomas had set his face against belief in the resurrection, and that is different.

Then, thirdly, there is the question of how Thomas came to spend the whole of Easter week disbelieving the Resurrection. What went wrong for Thomas? The answer is that he made the mistake of separating himself from the fellowship of the Church. He was unhappy with the way things were running – angry at Mary Magdalene and annoyed by the others, and so he walked off in a strop.

Thomas chose not to be with the Christian community that Sunday (Easter Sunday, as it turned out) and so he missed it when Jesus turned up.

In these days of social distancing, we cannot meet together as we would wish, and so second-best ways of meeting by means of the internet or the phone are a lifeline for us. Thank heavens for them.

But we long to be able to meet with other Christians each Sunday, because we know that this is how we can come to see Jesus.

Let us pray. Risen Christ, for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred: open the doors of our hearts, that we may seek the good of others and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace, to the praise of God the Father. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

The Easter Sequence – ancient words for today:

Christians, offer your praises to Jesus, the Passover victim. The lamb has redeemed the sheep: the Innocent Christ has reconciled sinners to the Father.

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<sup>2</sup> Common Worship: Collects and Post Communions, material from which is included here, is copyright © The Archbishops' Council 2000.

Death and life have contended in a breathtaking battle: the Prince of life, who died, ever lives to reign.

Tell us, Mary, what did you see on the way? "I saw the tomb of the living Christ and the glory of his rising, The angelic witnesses, the clothes, the shroud. Christ my hope is arisen; he will go ahead of his own into Galilee."

We know Christ is truly risen from the dead! Victorious King, have mercy upon us! Amen. Alleluia.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, through the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you always. Amen.

Revd Dr J Kennedy,

19 April 2020