

Evensong readings:-

Isaiah ch.26, vv 1-9,19

John ch.20, vv19-29

by
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He is Risen! This simple statement underpins our Christian faith.

Jesus was an exceptional person both in his coming and his emergence as a great teacher, and in his miracles, which glorified the power of God in him. In rising from his cruel and unjust death, he completed his mission to humanity, showing believers the truth of his promise: the promise that *“those who believe in me will not perish, but will have eternal life”*. Isaiah’s 19th verse, dating from about 570BC, foresaw that moment 600 years earlier.



I have replaced the second reading from Luke’s Gospel since it duplicates the first part of John’s 20th chapter. For entirely understandable reasons, much of what we would expect from contemporary news and drama is missing, but it is instructive to try to visualise the context of the events recounted in the Gospels.

Jerusalem would have been in a state of confusion, with the passion of the Passover for the more devout Jews, the antagonism brewed up over Jesus’ Crucifixion, and the cruel oppression of the Roman authority. The Disciples must have been frightened people; we assume that they were all men but surely there were women as well, believers and wives.

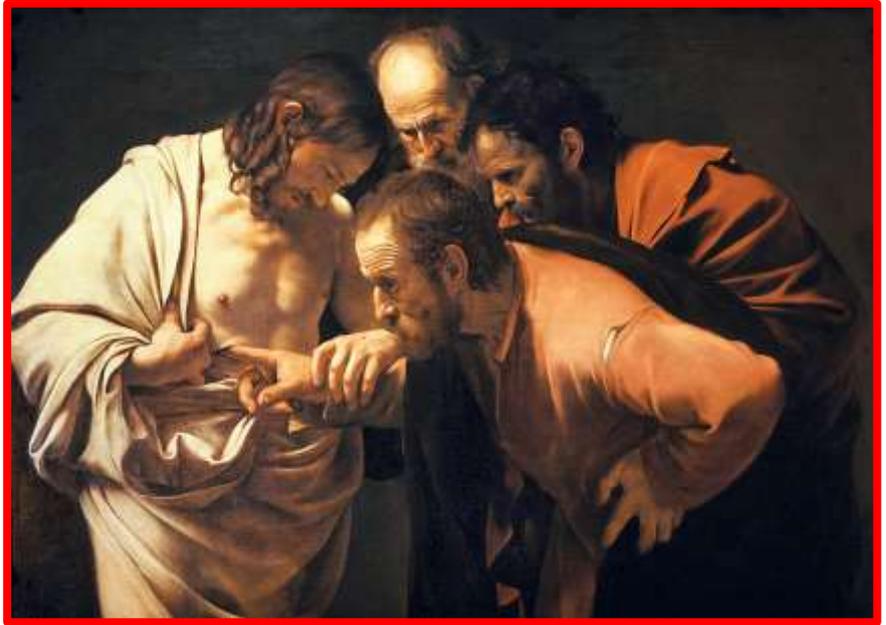
The doors were locked, but Jesus still appeared among them. That tells us that the Risen Jesus was no longer a mortal human, but in that life which lays beyond this one. That he could appear, disappear, suspend recognition as on the road to Emmaus, and in spirit, to turn Paul from determined enemy into a devoted servant and apostle.

His words to his Disciples are important to us, and are the basis for the Peace in worship. I think it is particularly important to recall the words of Jesus: *“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”*.

This is the part of scripture for which my pseudonym is now an integral part of Christianity – Thomas, the patron saint of people who never trust menus. I have a lot of sympathy with Thomas, which will surely mark me down when the Lord next picks his first team! Jesus had shown his wounds to his hands, feet and side to his Disciples. They were overjoyed as John records, but Thomas was missing. On his rejoining the others, Thomas was invited to believe the utterly incredible, and he wouldn’t. Now I don’t know whether the Jews played jokes, but as a people their sense of humour certainly goes back to the OT and Exodus. However, they must have pressed him, but Thomas wasn’t having it.

Jesus reappeared when Thomas was present, and convinced him. Jesus said to him “*Blessed are they who have not seen yet believe*”, but the fullness of Thomas’ confession of faith goes much farther – “*My Lord and my God*”

One part of the story is odd, appearing to anticipate Pentecost. Jesus breathed on his Disciples and conferred on them the power of the Holy Spirit.



Prayers

In our prayers, first of all we must give thanks for the life and work of Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, as Consort to Queen Elizabeth, as her great supporter and strength over such a long period of time, the longest in British history. He has achieved many things in both formal and social roles, perhaps the best-known being his Award Scheme of young people. A person rather larger than life, there is no doubt that he has brightened our lives, whether agreeing with him or not, and enjoying his famous offhand gaffes. A man of great strength, humour and with little malice, we pray that he may now rest in peace. We also pray for our Queen and the Royal family, who have lost one dearly loved, and ask that God will comfort Elizabeth and all who mourn.

Our prayers, among the many needs and causes we pray about, must include the unrest in Northern Ireland, and can we pray for the countries of Africa, seeking to overcome the madness and pointlessness of terrorism, and remembering those lives have been lost and those who mourn.

Amen.