

## Second Sunday of Easter

7<sup>th</sup> April 2013

*Acts 5:27-32, Psalm 118:14-29, Revelation 1:4-8, John 20:19-31*

We can approach the reading of the Holy Scriptures from many different perspectives:

- Seeking wisdom, learning, teaching.
- Opening our eyes to newness
- Confirming all that we already know
- Seeing them being about someone or something
- Seeing in them a reflection of ourselves
- Past, present and/or future

Today we look at them from a post-Easter perspective and so read them in the light of resurrection. We read them seeking to realize “A New Creation”, a new insight and a new reality for ourselves, our community and our world. The three readings give us quite different entry points and so invite us to contemplate different aspects of ourselves.

The “Acts of the Apostles” give us an insight into the post-Easter world of the disciples, and so too the birth of the early Church. This is also our world here today as we contemplate the reality of St Paul’s after our encounter with Easter. How will we make visible the reality of resurrection? It is a question for each of us and also a question of and for the community. And it is a question that only makes sense if we appreciate the reality of resurrection as a present moment possibility.

For most of its history the Church saw resurrection as an afterlife possibility, a result of a focus on the cross and crucifixion as the primary activity of Easter. Bringing life out of death is not a one-off event for anyone but rather part of the everyday process of becoming, and overcoming the many deaths that permeate every life. Bringing back into life that which has died, another aspect of resurrection, is also a process many of us can relate to.

The second reading from Revelation takes us beyond the literal, beyond the everyday (our everyday) and beyond the 4.9% of the universe that we see and know. Revelation invites us into the 95.1% universe that is unseen and so too into an appreciation of wholeness. Dark matter and dark energy make up 95.1% of our universe. What we see and know is only 4.9% of the whole.

The rolling away of the stone in the narrative of Easter is an opening up of wholeness. Psalm 118: 20 “*This is the gate of the Lord: the righteous shall enter it.*” The stone is rolled away and the seen and the unseen are no longer blocked from each other; “the light shines in the darkness”. Resurrection illustrates for us a movement from the tomb. If we follow the story of Easter the ‘movement’ of resurrection is not a staged miracle for all to see, it is not presented as an event, for it is unseen, and so should not be seen as a conversion. Resurrection occurs in the dark, at night and in the tomb. It is of the 95.1% rather than the 4.9%. It is, however, made

visible in the dawning of a new day and by those who can see, even envisage a change in circumstances, “A New Creation”. This again (like the context of the first reading) is our world, and a movement we too engage with as we awaken to the new days that follow our encounter at Easter.

The third reading from the gospel of John narrates the actuality of resurrection, and the ‘appearance of resurrection’. It also gives us the figure of Thomas so that we can relate more personally with the reading.

John’s gospel is quite different from the other three. Mark, Matthew and Luke use a biographical account of Jesus to reveal what is being revealed “in Christ”; and these accounts are often misunderstood as an historical record of events. John’s gospel is more theologically developed and seeks to explore and expand on the symbolic representations that serve to illuminate for us the significance of all that is revealed “in Christ”.

‘Doubting Thomas’ is so readily befriended because he echoes our doubts; and if an apostle can doubt then it’s also Ok for us to doubt. However, Thomas becomes even more significant when we appreciate doubt as the cutting edge of faith, and when we remember that Thomas had previously witnessed the raising of Lazarus, so for Thomas resurrection is already a ‘no-doubt’ reality. Perhaps Thomas voices our truth; when others, and when the church tells us “*We have seen the Lord*”, do we really believe them?

In a sermon I heard last week we were told that the purpose of Easter was to celebrate and remember that ‘Christ is risen’ and that ‘Jesus is Lord’. Sorry, but I’ll Thomas that! “*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.*” I/We need to ‘reach out and touch’, we need, and desire to feel the reality, the actuality of resurrection. And with that orientation we become open to a Divine encounter.

When Thomas gives voice to either doubt or desire, then; “*Jesus came and stood among them*”; his presence was known and the desire was realised, belief became actual. “*Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.*” Here we have in process, Thomas rolling away the stone. Psalm 118: 20 “*This is the gate of the Lord: the righteous shall enter it.*” Rolling away the stone tablets of Old Testament law, and putting his flesh into the enfleshed Divinity revealed in Christ.

In the three readings today we are given an orientation toward life lived in the light of resurrection. We are within Easter, and called forth from the tomb of mortality. Called from the visible 4.9% into and embracing a very different fullness, a whole that will be experienced as “A New Creation”.

How will we make real “A New Creation” and how will we be made new by the experience?

22 *The stone that the builders rejected: We can roll the stone away  
and it is marvellous in our eyes.*

25 *O Lord, save us, we pray: O Lord, send us prosperity.*

26 *Blessed is he who comes, in the name of the Lord:  
from the house of the Lord we bless you.*

From the place of St Paul’s we bless you

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

*by Marianne Williamson*

Peter Humphris