

Second Sunday after Easter 3 April 2016

Acts 5:27-32|

Psalm 118:14-29

John 20:19-31

[Easter 2C April 3, 2016](#) Textweek

The gospel of John can appear to be like a cryptic theological puzzle, or a collection of half-formed sermons; it feels as if the writer is very much wrestling at the boundary of understanding as he seeks to grasp the enlightenment he found revealed in and through Jesus.

Like us, the writer also has to let go in order to grasp, he has to discern and see beyond the givens of his past, his culture and his faith; and in John's gospel both what is written and the way it is written seem to reflect that same process. We are being invited to look beyond the obvious in the text and to see, or seek beyond what we think we already know.

As we explore Easter, or maybe 'if' we explore Easter, we are taken to the edge of our understanding and are invited to see ourselves and the world in a new light.

In today's gospel we are given two stories that seek to illustrate the post-Easter enlightenment; both are stories of illustration rather than documentary accounts of events; and so again we are invited to look beyond the documentation to fully appreciate what is there to be seen.

In the first story Jesus appears to the disciples without Thomas; we are told "*Jesus came and stood among them*", and we are also deliberately told "*the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews*".

Early, primitive understandings saw these stories as literal accounts of actual events, and so there evolved a ghostly, or supernatural quality of a raised Jesus and that elevated Jesus beyond human potential even beyond human experience, Jesus (God) was placed out of reach.

However, if we look for the experiential understanding that the writer is illustrating, we will see something quite different.

The setting for this post-Easter understanding tells us; "*the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews*" the disciples are locked in fear; they are still 'in the tomb'. Then, in the light of Easter, as the reality of

resurrection dawns they find the place of peace, *"Peace be with you"*; here we see a movement from fear toward peace.

Verse twenty then begins with 'after', so after this movement, resurrection is realised; *"the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord"* they saw the reality of what Jesus had revealed.

The writer then gives us a startling new theology; *"As the Father has sent me, so I send you"*; as I am so you are.

It is a complete blasphemy; it is couched in a cryptic phrase, *"As the Father has sent me, so I send you"*, perhaps to get us thinking, wondering rather than setting off any emotive response to an obvious blasphemy.

In this post-Easter awakening the gospel writer tells us that Jesus has revealed that 'as I am so you are'.

Verse twenty-two then reinforces and underlines the implication of this new understanding; *"Receive the Holy Spirit"*; and now even we are thrown into confusion for we have been told that this only happens at Pentecost.

The gospel writer conveys the reality of what is experienced in the movement from fear to peace, in this new worldview, a new experiential reality, the Holy Spirit is given.

Then there is even more, another blasphemy, *"23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

Here, we, the disciples, are told that we have the very power of God; what was previously in the hands of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is now given into our hands.

Having provided this story to illustrate a completely new understanding of God, the writer now tells the story again, a repeat but this time with Thomas present.

The transition between the two stories, verses 24 & 25, tell us that the first story is unbelievable, and for those first listeners to hear such blasphemy would have been unbelievable; even today most of the post-Easter Christian church has failed to see the enormity of what is being revealed here.

It is the clever, and deliberate, choice of Thomas that tells us that this repeat of the story is much more than a simple 'I want to see it for myself', for Thomas already knows of resurrection; he is the only disciple named as being present at the raising of Lazarus(Luke 11).

So the story is repeated with Thomas invited to feel the very wounds of Jesus; *"Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side"*; the wounds of one being felt by another.

This is the gospel writer's very description of 'peace'; for if we can only feel the wound of the other then we could never start a war with the other.

Thomas then exclaims a new reality, a new understanding of God that was already evident in the first story; *"My Lord and my God!"*

Thomas utters again the blasphemy of the first story; he proclaims a new understanding; God is not in heaven, God is not 'the father' of the past understanding, rather, God is among, enfleshed and here; Thomas places God within reach of us all.

Today's Church is yet to grasp this enlightened understanding, and for over two thousand years has sought to maintain a Judeo-Christian tradition a holding on to the old and yet a trying to also accommodate the new.

In the first reading from Acts, Peter clearly speaks of a God who interacts with Jesus; *"The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus"*; and rather than letting go of the Old Testament God in order to grasp the enlightened understanding revealed through Jesus, the early church simply merged them into two thirds of the Trinity.

In the mystical dream of Revelation, the second reading, there is again a distinction between God and Jesus; but there is also a delightful glimpse of resurrection's reality as Jesus is given the label; *"the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth"*.

These readings are all helpful in that they invite us into an fuller appreciation of who we are, and who we are in relation to God; and going back to the gospel, Thomas is a delightful device for us to see ourselves.

Jesus has revealed our Christ-likeness; *"As the Father has sent me, so I send you"*, as I am so you are.

Thomas let's go of his past understanding of an Old testament God, he feels and declares that God is enfleshed in humanity; *"My Lord and my God!"*

It is an empowering enlightenment; but it also has implications, for it changes the dynamic for the future and firmly reveals that we are the creators of tomorrow. We are those who can illuminate the path from fear to peace; and that begins with each of us seeking that movement for ourselves and with each other.

Easter is very much a process that takes us into a new way of living; an opportunity to experience the unbelievable, and to hear our truth;

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you", as I am so you are.

Peter Humphris