

**SERMON 24th APRIL 2022****To doubt is to be honest****By Rev Dr Fei Taule'ale'ausumai**

Here's the question that doubters or realists ask about Easter day. Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Some theologians believe that this is merely myth for others is that it is not about fact or fiction but about the fact that this was experienced and expressed. Even the gospel writers accounts differ and it was not until about the 9<sup>th</sup> century fifty years after he was executed that the story about Jesus' resurrection appeared in writing.

Thomas is not alone doubting Jesus resurrection from the dead the doubt was around then and is still around today, but how do we prove it, or even do we need to prove it did or did not happen? It's the crux of Christianity Jesus rising from the dead for many it is what is essential and crucial to the Christian faith and belief. It's a miracle and miracle is a term that is used to describe the inexplicable by natural or scientific laws and accordingly gets attributed to some supernatural cause.

Last week on Easter morning Mary reaches out to touch Jesus, but Jesus tells Mary to not touch him, she is being challenged to let go of him whereas in today's text Thomas is being encouraged to touch Jesus in order to believe to make that physical connection. He doubted the eye witness accounts of his fellow disciples and exclaimed, unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger in his side I will not believe. Fair enough word of mouth is not enough, I need physical proof that I can see with my own eyes and touch with my own hands. He spoke

on behalf of those who just stood around and said nothing, they were not being honest but Thomas articulated their thoughts with his honesty. When we doubt something happened it is probably better to articulate your doubts than to just remain silent, better to know what you are thinking rather than have others assume your thoughts. Thomas is a skeptic who refuses to believe without direct personal experience. Jesus said to him Thomas because you have seen me you believe, blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.

I like it when Muslims greet one another with Salaam Alaikum and the reply is Alaikum Salaam. Peace be upon you. They do it in everyday life, I like seeing the Irish do it too when they enter a home or public place, Peace be in this place. Christians do it on Sunday's but wouldn't it be nice if we did it everyday like the Muslims when we encounter and interact with others in our daily living?

Today's text speaks of locked doors, of secret meetings by night - and of fear. None of these things makes a person normally think about peace - nor does the presence of one whose body is marked by the signs of torture and death. It seems clear however that John wants us to see the two visits of Jesus to his disciples in the upper room as occasions of peace.

And perhaps they can speak to us about some dimensions of peace that we do normally think of - perhaps they can speak to us of peace in the midst of turmoil - of peace in the midst of fear – of peace in the midst of doubt.

False ideas about peace and joy abound in our society. These false ideas can distort our entire picture of what life is supposed to be about, and of who Christ is and of who we are.

There's a story about a woman by the name of Lucy Bregman she tells of how she once went to a worship service where the entire congregation was told "If you don't have a smile on your face, you've got the wrong religion and shouldn't be here. Christianity is a religion of joy."

She fled that service in tears - because she did not feel at that time like she could smile - she was having difficulties and was looking for comfort. Instead she was told that she was not good enough for God because she was not smiling. Been there, done that got the T-shirt.

God never expects us to falsify our experience.

Regarding Jesus scars, he could have miraculously obliterated his wounds after he was raised from the tomb, but chose not to. He bore the marks of his wounds into the presence of his disciples. In the same way Christ does not ask us to banish our wounds, our wounds is part of our story, our history, our pain our journey. Wounds both seen and unseen are a part of our reality both good and bad. Henri Nouwen talks of the wounded healer, how as he cared for the disabled and those who were struggling they actually cared for him, he received much more from those he cared for than he gave of himself.

The risen Christ came to his disciples in the midst of their turmoil and fear. He came in the midst of their doubt and their sense of having failed

both him and their own selves and said to them:office "Peace be with you."

And when he said this he showed them his wounds - the holes in his hands and in his side - as if to say: See these wounds - feel them and know that it is all right to hurt. Pain comes to us all – Jesus was hurt as all people are hurt - but that pain and that hurt no longer has dominion over him - he lives - as he said he would. He said, I told you that I would suffer - and that you, if you followed me, would also suffer - but I told you too that after passing through various trials and tests -that pain and even death itself would lose its power - its power over me and its power over those who believe in me.

The three times that Jesus offers his peace to his disciples in today's reading - it is done in close connection with the wounds of crucifixion. The enemies of peace had already done their worst to him. They had made cowards and liars of his followers and had mocked his own words and actions. They had humiliated him in the city streets. They had violated his flesh and robbed him of his life. But their war against him failed. On the evening of the first day of the week he came to his disciples and showed them that he lived despite the worst that could happen.

The confidence that the disciples received when Jesus came and said to them "peace be with you" is demonstrated in the response of the disciples to his appearance. Peace showed itself in their rejoicing - and in Thomas' confession of faith - "My Lord, and my God."

However, notice that none of the external circumstances of the disciples changed when they received and accepted the peace that Christ offered them. They believed in him - they had confidence in him - they knew that nothing could separate them from God's love after he appeared to them - but they still had to face the same situation they faced before he broke into the room they had locked because of their fear. They still had to face authorities. They still had to risk going out on the streets, they still had to deal with the crowds who had mocked and crucified Jesus. They still had to face trials and tribulations - as do we.

Peace be with you and blessed are you when you have not seen, as the disciples saw, and yet have come to believe.

Blessed are you - not because life will be plain sailing for you, Blessed are you - not because you will always want to smile and will never have to suffer.

As we approach ANZAC day tomorrow, we remember those who fought and served in the World wars and subsequent wars since.

We remember all our military personnel who ensure that we are secure and safe. There are many people out there with wounds we can see and cannot see. Silent witnesses, bruised souls. We all have our wounds and we don't go around showing them off to people, many of us hide them sometimes because we are ashamed and sometimes because they bring back horrible memories. Some of our wounds we cannot see, they are invisible but still hurt all the same. Jesus is the wounded healer who has come to heal all our wounds and take away any doubt from our hearts and minds that he is the risen Christ. Jesus breathed on them and said:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you,  
not as the world gives do I give to you,  
Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.  
Believe in God, believe also in me.

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old.  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of  
sun and in the morning we will remember them. Amen.