

Disappointment and doubt to happiness and hope.

26th April 2020

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." JOHN 20

Disappointment: So there they were on the Easter Sunday evening, hidden away behind locked doors and in fear of their lives –maybe the same fate would befall them as it did Jesus. They were used to his popularity, signs and wonders, wisdom and strength but yet he was arrested, tried and killed. It was all over. And if they didn't get away soon it would be over for them too.

I don't think the overwhelming emotion would have been fear though. I think it would have been the emotion that causes so much of our distance from God and each other, disappointment.

3 years of hope, excitement, discovery and time with the Messiah all gone in a day. Disappointment perhaps with a God who seemed to have let them down. Disappointment perhaps most of all though with themselves. Not understanding his ministry, arguing over who would be the greatest disciple, not being able to watch with Jesus while he prayed in Gethsemane, abandoning him as he was arrested, fleeing and hiding when he was tried, not even seeing him in his last moments.

Just the simple disappointment of feeling that they were not very good at following Christ. I sometimes feel that I'm just a terrible Christian –I get things badly wrong, I become self-centred, I realise that I am weaker than I think –In fact filming the last sermon I kept getting frustrated with interruptions and nearly lost my temper! And the temptation is to let disappointment flow over you –'I'm not good enough, it's not going to work, I should give up.'

Forgetting that God knows all about our flaws and has plenty of experience and patience in working with flawed people. Even worse than you!

And Jesus has a way of turning our disappointment into happiness and hope –and we'll see this in a minute.

Doubt: But the disciples were also consumed with doubt. Jesus was clear about his message –he would die and rise again after 3 days and –up until this moment of appearing, most of them did not believe it. They had seen it all, walked with God but yet still doubted –they had taken their eyes off Christ, seen the dangers and restrictions of the world around them and they doubted. Most famously of course Thomas. He is singled out in the story not necessarily because he was honest with his doubt but because he was not with them in the first place. Now Thomas seemed to be a disciple with more

bravery to face danger with Christ –In John 11:16 he speaks up for Jesus when he wants to go back to Judea (where Lazarus has died) and the other disciples think it is too dangerous –he says that they should go and be prepared to die with Jesus. So when he is not there on that first Easter Sunday evening with the others I think he wants to be left alone with his disappointment and grief. He leaves the fellowship, misses something special in the appearance of Christ and there is a lesson here. So they all doubted but Thomas gets to doubt more –*“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”*

Look, everyone doubts –some more than others, some longer than others, sometimes it comes and goes –one minute you feel you are walking in step with Christ and the next you feel far away. Inevitably faith will also involve doubt –it wouldn’t be faith otherwise. There’s this funny moment in Father Ted when Father Dougal Maguire is asked whether he ever has any doubts –he replies that those bits in the Bible –creation, Jesus, miracles, resurrection, ascension and all –they are the bits he has trouble believing in. It’s funny but there’s something in that. Doubt is a part of the Christian life but a part that fades away in the presence of Jesus.

You know in Mark 9 a father brings his demon possessed son to Jesus and ask if he can, will he heal him. Jesus answers that ‘everything is possible for one who believes’. The man replies ‘I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief!’ He believes and he doubts. But what matters is that he directed it all to Christ. Worry less about the size of your faith and worry more about directing it to Jesus. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12)

Disappointment and Doubt replaced by Happiness and Hope.

The disciples and then Thomas were overjoyed when they were restored to Christ –of course they were. The true happiness we all seek is when we are restored in relationship to our Creator –living the lives we are meant to live, not as slaves to sin. Jesus was present for a while to help them overcome their disappointment and doubt and he is present for you and I also. Not in human form anymore as he ascended to heaven, but in the power of His Spirit. V. 22 *And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”*

When you and I feel the circumstances of life overwhelming us, when disappointment, fear, anger etc start to well up in our lives again –seek the presence of Jesus. He is within us permanently in the Holy Spirit but sometimes we can crowd God out with the worries of the day. So take a moment when this happens, still yourself and say ‘Come Holy Spirit’.

And so happiness doesn’t just come to the disciples in the form of reassurance and belief in what is now -but also in a hope for the future. They all, including Thomas, get to restart their faith (again!). Crucially they then get sent. V. 21 *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

This is the new hope -sent now as Christ’s body, the church, connected to him as the head. His message, his hands, in his power, just as God sent Jesus, we too would be sent. To bring the good news, proclaim forgiveness and see the lost saved.

This is our commission and it is no less upon you. What is going to be your commission when we meet again? When God sends more people back to church? What is going to be our commission as a church?

What are we going to do to bless others, to do the do the good works God has prepared for us?

For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

May you know the infilling of the Holy Spirit as you seek to fulfil these good works.