

Reflection



- Showing love
- Giving hope
- Bringing peace

The Church of St John & St Leonard

John 20:19-23

Sunday 3rd May 2020

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."

As our passage opens we see the disciples hiding behind a locked door on the evening of that first Easter day. While their lockdown was for a very different reason to ours, I wonder if some of the emotions which they were experiencing are ones we can relate to? Fear for the future, a loss of freedom, perhaps even cabin fever! They have been on a rollercoaster ride – seeing Jesus perform miracles, witnessing lives being changed, encountering people being healed. Then hearing Jesus predict his own death. Denying knowing Jesus or at least walking away before Jesus was crucified. Now hiding in a locked room for fear of persecution.

And suddenly into that hopelessness, into that lock down Jesus appears! He stands before them and greets them "peace be with you" and we read that the disciples were overjoyed. I wonder if you have had any moments during this time of lock down where you have felt Jesus draw near and, despite the circumstances, been filled with an inexplicable joy? As I read the passage this week I was struck by the fact that Jesus appearing didn't change the reality of the disciples' situation. The fear of persecution from the Jews was just as real as it had been before. But knowing that Jesus was with them gave the disciples the courage and the strength to face their new reality. With Jesus present in their situation they could begin to rejoice. It reminds me of the words of Paul in the book of Philippians where he says "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances...I can do this through him who gives me strength". As I pray for each of you this morning, I pray firstly that God will give us his joy and his strength whatever we are facing today.

Jesus' presence first brings joy but then it brings a commission. In verse 21 we hear Jesus say "as the Father has sent me, I am sending you" and then he breathes his empowering, life giving Spirit upon them reminding them that what he has sent them to do is in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. The disciples needed that time to rejoice, that reminder of God's presence with them to launch them into what was next – a time of sharing the Good News with the world.

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Today is vocations Sunday, a day when each and every one of us as God's people are called to reflect on our calling to serve God. While vocations can involve wearing a dog collar or a blue scarf or standing at the front of Church speaking (and if you do feel called to any of these types of ministry I would absolutely love to talk to you about it) – I believe that each and every person has a vocation to serving God in a unique way. We are all called to identify the gifts and talents God has given us and work out how we can use them to his glory and to the benefit of those around us. God sends each of us out with a mission – to share his hope with the world. Sharing that hope involves words and actions and we have a unique opportunity to do that at the moment as we serve our community. For some it will be shopping, for others it will be through a phone call to a neighbour to check they are OK, or a smile at someone during the Thursday evening clapping for the NHS, or praying for people who may never know it was us who prayed.

Our passage reminds us that locked doors are no barrier for God! His work continues whatever the circumstances and He calls each one of us to partner with him in that work. I wonder what He is calling you to do today?

Also, if God has been stirring up a specific vocation in you, today is a brilliant day to step out in faith and see where that could take you. If Jesus can break through a locked door I'm sure he can break through any excuses or barriers we try to put in place – I know He did for me. So please do get in touch and I would love to talk it through with you.

But as we gather together this morning locked in our homes, I pray that we would all encounter the risen Jesus once more, greeting us and offering us His peace and that it would bring us joy no matter what else we face today.

Rector: The Revd Vicki Bryson



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