

Sermon for Sunday 7 April – The Second Sunday of Easter

Pete Postle, Reader

Acts 4.32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1.1–2.2; John 20.1-31

May all I say and think be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

In that first reading; 'With great power, the Apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and grace was upon them all.' Here we are, the Second Sunday of Easter, the story of doubting Thomas. On Easter Day, after Mary has seen Jesus in the garden, she returns and tells the disciples, and that evening, Jesus appears to them. Thomas is not there. Not seeing, he finds he cannot bring himself to believe the promise of the resurrection has been fulfilled. He needs physical proof; to be able to touch Jesus's wounded body, his hands, his side. Doubting Thomas, we have branded him all these years. But note that he really wants to believe. He's teetering on the fence. Must I turn away and forget all about Jesus, my master? Please somebody, prove to me that it isn't so; show me it is not so.

I Have a great regard for Thomas. Like Peter, he has his human feelings, who eventually overcomes them just one week later. Thus, this Sunday, in fact, the second of Easter, when the disciples, including Thomas this time, are all back in the same room, doors still shut. The others have seen the resurrected Jesus, but human fear in them keeps those doors shut. All of them still have their doubts, not just Thomas. Jesus appears to them again; 'peace be with you'. Thomas is invited to touch Jesus's hands, to put his hand into the sword wound in Jesus's side. Faced with the signs for which he had asked, he finds he can believe that final physical proof. He exclaims, 'My Lord and my God'. There starts our Christian belief. But see, everything that follows builds upon Thomas's eventual confession, his recognition of his master as the personification of God. His statement here is the ultimate summary of John's gospel, and that in turn provides the summary of our faith. It will take a total of 50 days after Easter Day, to spur those disciples out of that room, away from their fears for their own safety, but onto great things, spreading the word of God across most of the world known at that time. Read our passage from Acts again; 'Now, the whole group of those who believe were of one heart and soul'. Most accounts claim that the Apostles divided up the world by lot among themselves to go out to preach the gospel.

Now, that really set me going. I took a long time, a whole evening, buried in Wikipedia. For those of you who've got computers, and know Wikipedia, it's this online, what, encyclopaedia? Yes, of course it is, Wikipedia, encyclopaedia. I thought I'd tell you something are what some of those apostles achieved, because their works are what brings us here, convinced Christians. Thomas was a carpenter who travelled to northwest India, that's Pakistan, Afghanistan now, where he was commissioned to build a palace, but spent the money on the poor. See again, our reading, for that true virtue of our faith, our calling. The King was converted to the way. Thomas then moved south to India, where he converted many. There's a cathedral in Mylapore dedicated to St Thomas or Saint Tomé, discovered by the Portuguese when they invaded that part of India in the second century. Peter, we have studied over the Passion Week; sufficient to remember that he and Paul travelled throughout Asia Minor and eventually to

Rome, where Peter became the first Bishop. Andrew, who was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, you remember, travelled to preach alongside the Black Sea, along the river Dnieper to Kyiv, and then to Nugarov.

So he turned out to be a citizen of Romania, Ukraine, and Russia. He returned and founded the church at Byzantium, now known as Constantinople, and is the patron saint there. Matthew preached first in Judea and then in Ethiopia. Hence, the church there in Northern Africa. John, of the Gospel and Revelations, travelled to Ephesus; some people say, possibly accompanied by Mary, mother of Jesus, but we'll come back to these various possibilities later on. But there, John schooled Polycarp, who became Bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp then taught Irinais and Ignatius of Antioch, all three great first century writers and spreaders of the gospel. So John's influence spread across the north side of the Mediterranean and as far as France. James the Great was the son of Zebedee and Salomé, and the younger brother of St John. Salameh, we hear now and then; Salameh was a sister of Mary, mother of Jesus, which made James and John cousins of Jesus. Salameh was present at the crucifixion, along with Mary Magdalene and other women. James took the gospel to Spain, but then returned to Judea and was there beheaded by Agrippa. Eventually, his relics were returned, you'll probably know, to Santiago de Compostela.

Jude, Thadiaz, father, and Bartholomew are claimed to have brought Christianity to Armenia in the first century. They are together the patron saints of the Armenia Apostolic Church. Well, all these biographies are snippets of lengthy profiles that are found in Wikipedia. You will find it engrossing to read the complete records there and to realise that I have sometimes used just one of several possible versions of history. But all those versions have the same aim; to improve our knowledge and our faith and our appreciation and gratitude for the work of Jesus and then his Apostles.

Amen.