

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Easter

### John 20:19-31

At his final meal with his disciples in John, Jesus had promised not to leave them orphans. His appearances to them *after* his Resurrection were part of his fulfilment of this pledge. When he showed himself to them locked behind closed doors in Jerusalem, he made *real* the joy and the peace which he had spoken of at the supper.

He also prepared them for the future. They were to continue the mission which he had been given by the Father. Just as he had never been alone, neither would they. He solemnly breathed over to them *the Spirit*. He had spoken of this Spirit during his ministry. He had described it in detail as the "Paraclete" at the Supper. It had been symbolized in the water from his side at his death, when in turn they passed it on to others, then would sins be forgiven.

During his lifetime, Jesus had preformed many signs, with the purpose of producing belief. In the new age of the Spirit, faith was no longer to depend on this sort of sign. Thomas sought for the reassurance of touch and feeling as the price for his belief in the Risen Lord. Jesus refused to give such reassurance.

There are *two beatitudes* in John's gospel: one is concerned with *mutual service in the foot-washing* and the other with *belief which does not depend on sight*.

It is easy to identify with Thomas. He was the pessimist among the disciples. He regarded an invitation to go to Jerusalem with Jesus as an invitation to death. When Jesus called himself the Way he said bluntly, "How do we know the way?" Jesus, the good shepherd, knew his own and helped him to make a confession of Jesus surpassing all others in the gospel, "My Lord and my God."

As I mentioned, it is easy to identify with Thomas. In our "Reflection" from *Give Us This Day* by Rachel Held Evans, she writes, "Many of us entered the world with both an unparalleled level of conviction and a crippling lack of curiosity. So ready with answers, we didn't know what the questions were anymore. So prepared to defend the faith, we missed the thrill of discovering it for ourselves. So convinced we had God right, it never occurred to us that we might be wrong. *In short, we never learned to doubt.*"

Now she caught my attention with “We never learned to doubt!?!” She points out that there is a difference between ***doubting God*** and ***doubting what we believe about God***. She uses the example of Peter who had not doubted the necessity of the Jewish food laws. In the Acts of the Apostles, Cornelius came to where Peter was staying in Joppa. Cornelius had a vision to go to Peter have him come to Caesarea to talk with them about this Jesus. Almost at the same time Peter had a vision of the tarp filled with unclean animals where the same voice said to him, “Get up, Peter. Slaughter and eat.” The connection with Peter’s vision is that he baptized the family of the Roman Cornelius, a centurion, an uncircumcised Gentile! The only reason that Peter baptized them is that he realized the connection between his vision and Cornelius’ vision. “I see that God shows no partiality.”

But old habits die hard, as we read in Galatians, chapter 2, “...When (Peter) came to Antioch, I, (Paul,) opposed him to his face because Peter clearly was wrong. For, until some people came from James, Peter used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to draw back and separated himself, because he was afraid of the circumcised. And the rest of the Jews also acted hypocritically along with him, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.”

For us today, it is not so much a problem of religious laws, but how much do we love the Lord God, to see through what is needed and what is not. If Peter came to love the Gentiles as Paul did, his vision of the tarp of unclean animals, would have informed him and given him the courage to stand up to those who lived their faith not out of love for God and others, but because they love the Law more than putting into practice the Two Great Laws that Christ Jesus gave us: Love God and Love you Neighbor as Yourself.

With love for our neighbor, we can live with our doubts, and even bend the law out of our love for them. Without love, we sacrifice our neighbors for the Law, as Peter did in Galatia in the presence of Paul. Granted, Peter was more concerned about how his fellow Jews would feel about him breaking the Law by eating with Gentiles.