**Sermon for 2nd Sunday of Easter. Book of Acts Ch 2 ; Gospel according to John Ch 20. Caroline Seaton.**

May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

A locked room; Frightened; heat; general hub bub going on outside as though nothing was different! A sense of apprehension, excitement, nervous energy, expectation.

11 people together after an emotionally exhausting time. Not fully understanding what had just happened. A friend gone by a cruel death – death of crucifixion. A death usually associated with thieves and vagabonds.

They had heard the words of Jesus before he died and were waiting nervously for the next move. But what would that look like? They had no idea what was to happen next.

They were half expecting to be arrested too and were held up in secret not daring to venture out.

Then suddenly their friend is with them. But how? The door was locked! We don’t hear if the disciples queried his sudden appearance, but the sense of relief and joy must have been palpable. They recognised him – not so much physically but by his words. ‘Peace be with you!’ And he breathed fire on them. This must have brought them great hope. Hope for a future of eternal life. But did they fully understand the significance of this hope? How would it impact their lives? Although they knew Jesus had risen, they had not yet experienced the power of that risen life.

We hear Jesus breathed fire on them. In some gospel readings it’s said to be a flame on their heads. That is the image we think of, but was it more of an inner feeling of being filled with the Holy Spirit?

Many have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, many have not. I remember years ago when I was about 16, I was with a friend whose parents ran the International Bible Training Institute in Burgess Hill just outside Brighton. We were in the chapel and the sense of togetherness with people from many different countries praying together in their own languages, and singing together, was a very moving experience. And I felt a warm glow fill my body, starting at my feet and slowly moving up until it reached my head. I felt alive. The sense of pure fulfilment of something beyond my understanding or measure, was profound!

So, was that how the disciples felt? A feeling of a fire filling their whole being? I imagine it was.

Thomas, also known as Didymus, but probably better known as ‘doubting Thomas’. Poor Thomas. One of the few people who has a negative connotation to his name.

There was Judas, recognised by his name – Judas Iscariot, despite betraying Jesus isn’t known as Judas the betrayer!

And Peter, despite rejecting Jesus three times, is not Peter the rejector. But known as Peter the rock, the corner stone on which the church is built.

But Thomas wasn’t with them on this occasion when Jesus had appeared to them. And when the other disciples told him ‘We have seen the Lord’ he found it hard to take it in. He hadn’t experienced that warm glow of love and hope which the risen Christ brought them. He was understandably scared, scared to believe; was he being taken for a ride? He wanted proof – an honest reaction to something so unbelievable!

But I can sympathise with Thomas. He had missed out on a life changing experience with his fellow disciples and perhaps felt cheated? Or he didn’t want to acknowledge he’d missed out? After all it was a truly life changing experience!

When I heard on the radio that the royal family were rushing north to be with the queen, despite her age and her appearance some few days earlier, I found it hard to absorb that something was happening. I had to turn on the TV and see the reports coming through for myself that she had later died. It wasn’t that I doubted the radio but I found the reports hard to absorb – I didn’t want to hear it, didn’t want to believe it. Perhaps this was how Thomas felt? And as Phil said last week, it took Peter some time for the news of the risen Christ, to click.

He wanted corroboration that this event had happened. He wanted to see the marks on his hands and feet but when he hears Jesus’ voice “peace be with you” and “stop doubting and believe”, he acknowledges “my Lord and my God”.

In our first reading from the book of Acts Ch 2 we hear a very confident Peter speaking out with authority to the listening crowd. He has obviously been reflecting deeply on the way in which Jesus has fulfilled the prophecies of scripture in an extraordinary and unexpected way. Being a Jew himself he can see how his heritage has been greatly enriched by the resurrection and has helped him see fresh meaning to the scriptures.

Peter addresses the crowd with confidence reminding the people of the recent events which have brought great hope to the people. But he reminds them of their lack of understanding despite many wonders miracles and signs which Jesus performed. The word ‘You’ is mentioned 6 times in the first 3 lines - ‘you’ who live in Jerusalem; explain to ‘you’; accredited to ‘you’ by God; ‘you’ yourselves know; this man was handed over to ‘you’; and ‘you’, with wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross. He is certainly making a point to the people of their lack of belief, I think!

But later making the point quite clearly ‘That God raised Jesus from the dead freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep it’s hold on him.’

Peter’s next line is reminding them the words of the patriarch David -

‘Seeing what was to come, God had promised on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne’. And here it was – happened as foretold all those years ago. The reality that God raised Jesus to life and a change in tone, by Peter who says ‘**We**’ are all witnesses of it. Peter’s reinforced faith.

Hope. Verse 26 of the reading from Acts ‘therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will also rest in **hope**, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one decay’.

This is surely the hope for us? The presence of the risen Lord giving us purpose, giving us courage, confidence and a sense of anticipation. The hope of life everlasting that sustains us now and will do for the rest of our lives.

Have we come to church today expecting to be reignited, reassured that our Lord lives? The disciples were elated when they heard the words ‘peace be with you’. For them it was only a week ago. Has our week held the same eagerness? Do we feel the same elation?

Has this Easter had the same impact on us? Has our faith been reinforced? Has it been refreshed with the Holy Spirit? Have we allowed ourselves to dare to be changed? To have a new and fresh spirit within us?

We have heard some wonderful sermons, and experienced powerful acts of worship over this Easter period. But the disciples experienced Jesus there and then, and we experience Jesus’ presence with us every time we meet in the breaking of bread and wine, and when we meet in his name. Alleluia, alleluia.

Amen