

2nd Sunday of Easter

7th April 2013

Eucharist with hymns in The Parish Church of St. James, Louth

A love revealed that transforms our doubts and fears

Last week we celebrated the joyous discovery of the empty tomb – the promise of transformation that is given to us by knowing the love of God. Today, by contrast, our readings take something of a downbeat approach to Easter – we are reminded of the arrest of the apostles by the Temple police as they spoke Jesus' message in the weeks after that first Easter, and our gospel reading takes us back to the fear of those first few days – when disciples hid behind locked doors, unknowing of what the empty tomb meant.

So often, I hear that story of Jesus appearing to the disciples and the implication of criticism directed at the doubting Thomas and I kick myself for being taken in by first impressions. I position myself in that story not as Thomas, but as one of those who criticise him for his lack of faith. How could he not just accept that Jesus was risen from the tomb – that he lived on, and that God's love had the capacity to triumph over everything?!

It is only with some difficulty that I have to remind myself every time I hear this story that the villain of the piece is not Thomas – or certainly not Thomas alone. I normally place myself alongside those other disciples – who were trying to persuade Thomas of the truth of what they had seen, and seemed frustrated by his lack of imagination – his lack of faith. But what I miss – perhaps with them – is that Thomas was not the one locked in that room fearful of what might happen next. Whilst those who saw Jesus where hiding for fear of what might happen Thomas had, for whatever reason, ventured out into the wider world.

Far from being the righteous witness of Jesus presence – I am then thrown from being a 'good' disciple, one of those who was to be favoured by a vision of the risen Lord, to one who was so fearful – who had missed the point so much – that I was hiding for fear of my life.

So much for not doubting the transforming power of God's love.

So just as we have to remind ourselves that Peter's denials as he witnessed Jesus' trial were the denials of the last disciple who remained after all the others had fled – the doubt of Thomas leads us to remember the doubts and fears that we all have. Doubts and fears are nothing of which we should be ashamed – they are the very fabric of who we are, and why, in the first place, we need the transforming love of God that we find revealed at Easter. But what we are called to do when we encounter our doubts and our fears is not to surrender – not to give in, and fight doubt and fear with doubt and fear. We are called, as was Peter early on that last morning, as were those disciples in the locked room, as was Thomas when he returned to that room, to be open to the transformation that is brought about if we open ourselves to the presence with us of a God who is love. For it is from the doubts and fears of those first disciples that the message of God's love grew and reached out to tens, and then hundreds, and then thousands, and then millions. It is from that realisation that the God of love was with them that transformed (and still transforms) our world – and it is our own realisation that the God of love is with us that will transform us and has the capacity to transform the world through which we walk.