

Easter People!

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-end

*For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore.
[Psalm 133:3]*

What sort of Church do we want to be?

Now that we are settling down after the thrill and chaos of Holy Week and Easter this seems a reasonable question for us to address at this time.
Any ideas?

From the readings for this morning I think there are three things that are obvious and challenging.

1. Convinced of the Resurrection

This isn't a social club! The reason we are here is because of that foundational conviction: we believe that Jesus is alive and that he has conquered death.

- ✦ John knows that this is something that is strange - which is why he opens his first letter with stating clearly that this is something he has experienced: Jesus physically rising from the dead isn't just an idea but is something tangible. It could be **heard, seen and touched!**
- ✦ In John's Gospel it transforms those who met Jesus from those who were hiding behind locked doors and afraid into those who would fearlessly go and tell anyone about it.
- ✦ The forgiveness that God offers because Jesus died for us is assured because Jesus lives now.

We may respect other faith traditions, but that God himself took flesh, lived, died and rose from the dead separates us from all others.

The Church needs to have confidence in the Christian Gospel.

2. Responsive to the needs of the people

Such was the conviction of the people who first followed Jesus that they weren't owned by anything else. They may have had personal possessions but they didn't treat them as if they were private possessions.

- ✦ The Psalm we read is one of the songs of ascent - the hymns people sang on pilgrimage to the great festivals in Jerusalem. In going to worship new people were encountered and immediately they were one because of the shared purpose.
- ✦ Acts then tells us that the unity in faith made people aware of the needs of those around them. **There was not a needy person among them** is a powerful testimony to the difference that faith makes.
- ✦ The private morality that John challenges to in his letter - to be honest about our sin and to walk in the light - seems the easy option compared to this. The more like Jesus we become the more willing we are to help others.

We don't need, today, to put the title deeds to our homes into the collection. But I suppose I am left with two questions:

- i) Would we be honest about any real needs - that takes humility, and
- ii) How we we respond if there were such a need? Are our possessions personal or private?

3. Open to Questions

Thomas is one of the great heroes of faith. Can you imagine what he must have felt like to have missed the Easter evening encounter with Jesus? It is the honesty of his doubts that was the beginning of his faith.

- ✦ Thomas wanted tangible proof - it was what the others had known. His language is strident - **unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.**
- ✦ It was important to Thomas that this was Jesus - and when he saw him he acknowledged both the resurrection and Jesus divinity.

The Church is where people discover faith - and many do that by facing their questions. Some find that difficult because it challenges their own convictions, but we need to be gentle with doubt and help each other to having life because they believe.

If this is the sort of Church we want to be - and Scripture makes it clear that it should be - it is exciting and will challenge us beyond our comfort zone.

Time to get my favourite sermon story out:

Kierchegaard's Ducks!