

Forgiveness!

Acts 5²⁷⁻³²; Psalm 118^{14-end}; Revelation 1⁴⁻⁸; John 20^{19-end}

This is written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. [John 20³¹]

Last week we celebrated the resurrection - and that remains the dominant feature of our worship for the next 40 days.

Today is Low Sunday, traditionally when clerics have a Sunday off to recover from Easter.

The focus of the Gospel reading is also on Thomas - who arrives at the conclusion that Jesus is risen a week late: in the end he didn't need the evidence because he met with Jesus!

But that isn't what links the readings for today - have a look at them and screaming from the text comes the inspiration for that great Good Friday hymn when it says,

*He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven
Saved by his precious blood.*

John's Gospel records Jesus commissioning his disciples:

If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

Peter and John are before the Sanhedrin because they wouldn't shut up about Jesus and God kept interfering in the justice of the Sanhedrin (e.g. angels kept letting people out of prison). Peter and John are clear in their convictions that they have to do what God wants and not keep humans happy - not a bad principle - and then goes on to point out the heart of the Gospel:

God exalted him (after he had been killed) **at his right hand as Leader and Saviour that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.**

Revelation certainly luxuriates in the resurrection of Jesus - **Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.** As a

result of that we are **a kingdom of priests serving his God and Father.** Nevertheless. John here makes the point plain:

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood.

Thus far today I haven't said anything to cause anyone any problems - Jesus died that we can be forgiven.

Yet, forgiveness follows repentance; and repentance follows on from acknowledging that we need to repent; and that follows from acknowledging that we have done things that are wrong.

In our modern world, where people seem to think that they can do what they like, and only if it suits them, that isn't so easy or straightforward.

Unlike Thomas who doubts the resurrection, the modern affliction seems to be that they doubt their need of forgiveness or even their need of God.

Before the Church can proclaim forgiveness it needs to be honest about sin! As surely as forgiveness binds us to God, sin separates us from God.

- ✦ Sin isn't accidental, it is deliberate: however much you are tempted to do something that alienates us from God, you still have to choose to do it.
- ✦ Sin isn't incidental, it is damaging and dangerous: how easily we convince ourselves that the things we think and say and do that ignore the call to holiness, integrity or Christlikeness don't really have an effect on us.
- ✦ Sin is incremental because it grows because its effect on us quarterises our consciences and dulls our awareness of its consequences.

Sin, unless it is dealt with, is terminal. All God requires of us is that we ask for it.

Once we are forgiven we then can live like forgiven people and we ourselves can forgive others. Never doubt that this is the heart of the Gospel and a direct consequence of the resurrection of Jesus.

This would have been the sermon preached, but I am grateful to my colleague, Canon John Austen, for covering for me with unexpected visit to hospital.