**St Mary’s Parish Church 2nd Sunday of Easter, 23/04/2017**

Acts 2:14a, 22-32, Psalm 16, 1 Peter 1:3-9, John 20:19-end

We all know the saying that if you want to make God laugh you tell him your plans! We plan to work to achieve what we need and want, we plan to balance life with social activities, we plan to be better and do better, but how many of us have a living and definite plan? I remember watching Michael Caine in the film ‘the Italian Job’ and he definitely had a plan! He planned a to steal a gold shipment from a bank in Turin using Mini’s to help execute the job and a coach as his getaway vehicle – and a really good plan it was too (not that I am suggesting it is good to rob banks!)

When I read the passage from Acts, I was immediately struck by the words in Peter’s sermon; ‘God had a Definite Plan’ – words that have stayed with me all week, words with a purpose for all God’s people.

God knew, from the beginning of creation that He would need to let part of himself go, He had already planned Calvary, He planned to be separated and ripped apart through death from His own Son in order to bring us to Himself – there was no other way, this was always His Definite Plan.

Throughout the Bible we can see now, looking back in our present age, how the great plan of Jesus’s sacrifice is woven into every part of the Old and New Testament, beginning with Jesus being part of the creation, through the fall of man, to the sacrifice of animals to appease God’s anger and atone for human sin.

All the prophetic readings we had through Lent, where the Messiah is hailed as the supreme sacrifice, when animals will no longer be the ‘scapegoat’, where our sins will no longer be absolved through transference in the rituals of animal sacrifices, but will be absorbed, taken on in full and poured out in the death of God’s Son for total and everlasting absolution, ***all these prophesies have come true!*** It is a wonderful thing to read them in the light of salvation and look backwards at this great plan.

Peter is on fire with faith as he speaks to the people, affirming God’s plan and action, telling them that God has raised Jesus from the dead, certainly and surely, and who better to speak about it as he witnessed it all in person!

In the Gospel, Peter’s enthusiastic dash to the tomb is in sharp contrast with how Thomas dealt with the resurrection. Peter was full of hope and excitement, but Thomas wanted to make sure – after all it was a lot to take in and it wasn’t exactly ordinary news, was it? I wonder how many of us would have needed to physically meet the risen Lord to know for ourselves to know that he was actually alive?

We are all different, some of us slow and steady and needing reassurance, some of us impetuous and rushing in – God loves us individually, Jesus died for us individually, and we are all precious in his eyes.

Jesus says to Thomas ‘Peace be with you’, with no recrimination of his unbelief, just assurance that He, Jesus, understands.

Then he shows Thomas his wounds and Thomas believes immediately with ‘My Lord and my God’. He just needed to be sure for himself that this was his Lord – I understand that and I think that this was written almost to encourage us - The Definite Plan is a lot for us to take in. if we could fully take it in, we would be living differently don’t you think?

The Gospel says in this passage, ‘These things are written that you may come to believe that Jesus in the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have everlasting life in his name. This was written to help us to understand doubt is normal.

See the definite plan? All the history, all the works of the prophets and even the writings in the New Testament – all there so that we can look back and see the thread of Jesus, throughout all time, and be given the opportunity to believe in Jesus so that we may have everlasting life in His name. Wow.

Peter says, ‘this man Jesus, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, was crucified and killed. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in death’s power. This Jesus, God raised up’.

So, what happened to the definite plan in the Italian Job? – after all that planning, all the risk, all the execution of the plan, the team were left hanging between life and death, uncertainty and faith, in the coach hanging on the mountainside!

But blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! We are not left hanging with His definite plan, or in any doubt. By his great mercy, he has given us a new birth into living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead – a truly great, definite and everlasting plan that shows God’s love for each us and to follow Him should be our plan, and if we do, we will find abundant life in His glorious resurrection.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen, He is risen indeed. Alleluia.