

Emotions & Feelings!

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

But these are 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]

You will know that I am not given to the open expression of my emotions or sharing my feelings: I was trained to be emotionally continent and have always had the view that feelings are to be distrusted!

That said, the readings for today are full of what the people of faith have felt throughout the generations – and over the readings we see how faith changes how they feel.

- ✘ The first feeling that appears is that of *fear*: **It was evening on the first day of the week and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews.** Fear is a very disabling emotion, it can paralyse even the strongest of people. If we were in the same situation, of being associated with someone who had just been executed for treason and you were identified as their lieutenants, we may be afraid.

Christians all over the world still experience that fear – 5,898 Christians were murdered because of their faith last year. The top 10 areas of persecution are: Afghanistan; North Korea; Somalia; Libya; Yemen; Eritrea; Nigeria; Pakistan; Iran; and India.

- ✘ Imagine the difference Jesus made when he appeared in the room and declares, *Shalom*. The **peace** that Jesus gave and gives is like a hug where you know that everything is going to be OK.

The **peace** that Jesus gives becomes the basis of the commission for the Apostles, **as the Father sent me, so I send you** and then of that first Pentecost, **he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.** It is this that gives them the authority to forgive sins – and being forgiven is a great and liberating feeling!

- ✘ Traditionally, Thomas has been associated with having doubt. But what if it wasn't that but *FOMO* (Fear of Missing Out)? What he is expressing is his frustration, even his anger, at not having been with his friends when Jesus had been there.

A great many Christians live under the shadow of FOMO, while not giving the commitment that means they won't miss out and try, as Thomas did, to inflict their frustration on others.

- ✘ True to form, the Psalmist expresses that settled *confidence* in faith – **O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy endures for ever.**

So, too, the Book of Revelation inspires *awe*: we enter heavens throne room and see Jesus **the firstborn of the dead and the rulers of the kings of the earth** (lets hope that Putin hears this in Church today as he celebrates the Orthodox Easter); and that hymns, **to him who loves us and frees us from our sins by his blood, and makes us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.**

- ✘ But then we arrive at the Acts of the Apostles and discover *fearlessness*: that fear that locked the disciples away led to them (earlier in Acts 5) being locked in prison for proclaiming the resurrection and for healing people in Jesus name. The story goes on, **during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors.** The apostles went back to the Temple to **tell the people the whole message.**

Unsurprisingly, this annoyed the Sanhedrin, and we find them back in trouble. When challenged, Peter says, **we must obey God rather than any human authority.** When he goes on to say, **the God of our ancestors raised up Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree but God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.** He concludes, **We are witnesses of these things.**

For our age and generation we need God to move us from that feeling of fear to fearlessness and for us to proclaim Jesus, whatever the consequences.