

## April 19th - 2nd of Easter

Acts2: 14a, 22-32

### Jesus has a plan - God's plan - not ours

Peter stands up at the major Jewish festival of Pentecost - which is 50 days after the Passover. So there are Jews there from so many nations and places - all come together to worship God. And Peter has just been filled with the Holy Spirit and he comes out of the room and declares - shouts to the busy streets - Listen to me!

And people would have been talking about Jesus' crucifixion - how this so called Messiah was found guilty of blasphemy. How he was "cursed by being hung on a tree" as it says in Isaiah. Perhaps there were rumours about him coming back to life too. And that maybe he was more trouble than he was worth, and now things were going to get back to normal.

Peter says - woa up there! This Jesus - remember him - you were there, you say the amazing things he did - healing people, feeding people, lame walked, blind see - all the stuff Isaiah also says - he was something special.

Well, yes, you killed him, or those outside the law killed him, but listen - this was all part of the plans of God.

God is bigger than you - his plans are so much more than ours

Sally Tointon shared a song this week -

Even when I don't see it, You're working,  
Even when I can't feel it You're working  
You never stop, You never stop working.

Peter is telling the crowds that even though they can't see it, God was working. Jesus dying was part of the plan.

And that he has risen to life - death couldn't hold him, it was impossible for Jesus to be held in his power.

And then he goes on to say quote bits of psalms about the Holy One not experiencing corruption or going down to Hades - and says - this can't be King David talking about himself, because we know David died. This is talking about Jesus - the Messiah.

This boldness Peter has - in a moment we'll hear the next reading about how just a few weeks ago he was behind locked doors for fear. Now he's standing in front of crowds telling them they killed the Messiah but its ok! This is the simple fisherman - what's he doing? He'd never be this strong without having seen Jesus. He says - we are witnesses.

Imagine being in a terrible situation, and feeling like not only is it bad and scary, but all your hopes and dreams were shattered - and the person you'd trusted turned out to be a fake. And then.. and then... it turns around - by some incredible way - night is turned into day, and those hopes and dreams were fulfilled 100 times better, and that person - you were right to trust him, he was always telling the truth - you just couldn't see how it was in the plan....

That's what happened to Peter and the disciples, and we need to know that God has a plan for us too - this God who can raise Jesus from the dead, can certainly get us through these tough times...

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John 20: 19-31

## **Jesus loves us - God is for us**

So we're back to that first Easter day - this is Sunday evening. The disciples saw Jesus arrested - and most fled from the garden. Some stayed with him and watched him on the cross, but then they left there too. Some went to take his body and bury it. They have seen the person they followed, loved, beaten and killed, and the revolution he was leading is over. And now they are scared the Romans will come for them too - as his followers. Its only a matter of time before there's a knock on the door and they are dragged away.

Some of the women - John always includes all the core followers as disciples, not just the 12 male apostles that the synoptic gospels have - have said they saw Jesus, and Peter and John had some strange message about the tomb being empty.. but these disciples don't know what to think.

Fear - they will be arrested

Guilt - they betrayed their friend, they didn't stick up for him or help him

Despair - they have wasted their lives for nothing...

And then Jesus appears - behind locked doors. He doesn't knock. He's just there.

And he says - Peace - just like the angels say in the nativity stories! Peace!

And they no longer feel afraid

And he shows them hands and feet and side - its really me!

And they no longer feel guilt - he reassures them it was all part of God's plan, they are not to blame

And then he gives them the holy spirit - and immediately commissions them, gives them responsibility - to forgive others

And they no longer feel despair - they have a job, a purpose, the mission is back on! and they're the ones to do it!

And we too can feel fear - but God says - Peace

we too can feel guilt - and God says - be forgiven

We too can feel hopeless or helpless - yet God says - its not over, I still have plans and purposes for you!

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Lets talk about Thomas..

He gets a hard time because he says he's not going to believe. But you have to know that this is written to encourage us, when we find it hard to believe.

And we are just like Thomas.

Its hard to believe that this old phone and this new phone are the same thing.

its hard to believe that all this music on here, could come out of this iPod - or the other way round!

We like to see the world as it is, as we think it should be, and then struggle when things aren't that way.

So we should have pity on Thomas - he's not used to seeing someone come back to life in a new way before - someone he'd seen killed, now walking around - its not easy to just accept.

And i do feel sorry for him. He met his friends, close friends, they lived together for 3 years, and they say - Jesus is risen, and he's like - I know you want to believe that, but its not true. And the more they get excited and are so happy, the more he thinks they're having a joke or just

confused. And what a sad week - while they are on cloud 9 - knowing Jesus is alive, he's still walking around in fear, guilt and despair - but now even lonelier because none of his friends are with him anymore. Its the worst week of his life.

And next week - Jesus appears again - but let's read this story carefully - not what we are expecting to hear.

Jesus doesn't - ah - doubting Thomas - what a loser you are! He doesn't say - Thomas - you're fired! He doesn't say - you've failed, you've let me down.

Jesus is full of love and compassion. Here Thomas - see what the others saw last week, and have faith.

Jesus says - that's ok - here, have another go...he rescues him..

Jesus has such pity on him and rescues him from his lonely place, and restores him.

This is what we need to hear today.

In the midst of our worldwide trauma - of a world turned upside down - with sadness, fear, loneliness,

we need to know - that God has a plan - this has not outfoxed God

we need to know that - Jesus loves us, God is for us - He still gives us his peace, his shalom

we need to know that - Jesus is still in the rescuing business

just like he was with Peter sinking in the waves, or Jonah falling through the water - Jesus reached out a hand, he sent a whale - he didn't condemn Thomas but rescued him

God didn't send this virus - but he is using the bad things of this world, to bring out the good - so much value for the NHS, or Retail or Teachers. So much kindness and thoughtfulness, so much time and peace, so much appreciation of nature - and I could go on

And when we look back, we will see what a miracle, what a gift it was that we had peace at all. That we were able to be calm, and fearless, and remain determined.

And we must hope and know that Jesus has always been about rescuing and saving us - and that he has not changed.

Thomas declares My Lord and My God - which is the pinnacle of all John's gospel is about - a suddenly seeing and realising a personal relationship with the God of all the cosmos.

So we're going to sing - I believe in Jesus