



Church in a Bag

Sunday 11 April

Dubbo Uniting Church



A Gathering

Jesus said to them again

"Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you".

**When he had said this, he breathed on them
and said to them**

"Receive the Holy Spirit".

**Let our rejoicing be heard far and wide as we witness
to our belief in the risen Lord.**

A Prayer

Gracious and loving God, You raised Jesus from the dead, disclosing forever your great love for the world which includes me. We respond to such love with gratefulness and awe. We respond with our worship, our actions, and our whole lives, asking you to bless them. Help us to focus on You now, in the power of the Holy Spirit so that Your love may be revealed. We pray in the name of our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

Preparation

We all need encouragement, and we all need to build up others and encourage them. I invite you now to remember a time when a person from church, a teacher, parent or friend has encouraged you. How did you feel? How did they encourage you (with words, a knowing look, clapping, a card of thanks...)? Now think of a time when you know you made a difference to someone else. We give thanks for both.

Readings: John 20:19–31

Reflection

This is a powerful, rich passage which appears each year. The disciples are gathered together on the evening of the discovery of the empty tomb and that Mary Magdalene has shared with them the news that she has seen the Lord (verse 18). The disciples are feeling fearful behind locked doors; Jesus appears and says, “Peace be with you” – this phrase appears three times in this reading. He shows them His hands and sides, then commissions them and breathes on them saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit”.

Jesus then introduces the possibility of His disciples forgiving sins. Today our church is focused on Mission, and here we read that peace and the Holy Spirit are given, empowering us to bear the forgiving transforming love of God into every sphere of human experience. This Jesus relates to both personal matters (such as families) and public matters (such as economic injustice).

(Verse 24) Here we learn Thomas was not present at that time. When they share the news that made them happy, so he doubts and will not believe what he has not seen. Behind those locked doors, what must be going through their minds after all that has happened since the last days of Jesus life and his death and the news Mary Magdalene brings about having seen the Lord? Thomas will respond and goes beyond emotion, demonstrating renewed faith rather than doubt. He will witness the faith in dangerous times for the love, grace and forgiveness is given in peace to all who would hear and receive.

Our Faith is best expressed in life together, in community and in fellowship—the Christian way is not an individualist creed but a calling to life in committed community. Our community is built with real brothers and sisters who need to love, be loved, to value and be valued.



So - what part does the resurrection play in our faith journey? And - how can we have our doubts dispelled so that we come to make that same confession as Thomas - "My Lord and my God"?

Thomas' story can give us encouragement - although he was slow in starting as he wrestled with his doubts, the power of conviction and the surge of the Spirit drove him on and he leapt ahead of all the rest and reached the full truth.

Seeing these awful wounds suffered for him, he learned what God was like. He came to realise that as Christ was, so God is, and he made the most tremendous declaration of faith the world had ever seen or heard: "My Lord and my God".

A song to sing or to read: In Christ Alone

In Christ alone my hope is found
he is my light, my strength, my song.
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease.
My comforter, my all in all.
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
then bursting forth in glorious day
up from the grave He rose again
and as He stands in victory
sin's curse has lost its grip on me
for I am His and He is mine
bought with the precious blood of Christ.

In Christ Alone continued

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

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Closing Prayer

Gracious and loving God, this beautiful Uniting Church community is indwelled by and gathered around God, in Christ. It is a community of testimony and of a witness to be shared. It is an honour to share the witness (say what we know for sure about Jesus) for we are thankful for our relationship with God. Help us to be a community living in the light where there is truth-telling about ourselves. A place where we do not live in denial about ourselves or the powers of sin and death which have such a powerful hold on us at times and a hold on the wider world. We know this darkness and our part in it only too well, but they are not the last word. What a relief! For the last word belongs to You, it belongs to love and not hate. Thank you that there is forgiveness, a new start, a way to go forward, a way to be free.

To be a member of this community is to become aware that there is help, that Jesus is both sacrifice and advocate. He speaks up for us. What seemed like death in Holy Week is life for us and not only for us, but for the whole world. Praise be to you Lord, for you do not abandon us, but embrace us with wounded hands, with love and words of peace.
Amen

With thanks to Rev Mel Graham for preparing today's reflection



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