

St. Philip's Anglican Church O'Connor  
Second Sunday of Easter—15 April 2007  
Revd Rob Lamerton

*Acts 5.27-32; Psalm 118.14-29; Revelation 1.4-8; John 20.19-31*

“These (stories of what Jesus did) 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.” This is a wonderful ending to this episode and may originally have been the ending to the whole Gospel.

The purpose of the Gospel is *belief*, and the purpose of belief is that you may have *life*

This is not some narrow sectarian, negative, view of life. This is *life* in relationship with God, in the way that Jesus is in relationship with God: authentic, forgiving, confronting of selfishness and false religion, open, healing, aware, accepting—too good to be true?

This belief and life are not just for those who have seen the risen Lord. They are just as much available to those who have not seen—they too are blessed!

Verse 24: Jesus said to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” But the non-seeing believers are to depend on the witness, the stories, of the seeing believers; Thomas is one of these. Originally refusing to believe because he had not seen, he comes to see. But he has firstly to accept the story of the other disciples.

They were locked away on the first day for fear of the Jews. (There are some similarities to the Pentecost story!) Jesus appears, defying the locked doors. He greets them, “Peace be with you,” the traditional greeting. He shows them his hands and side; this is the same one who was the wounded and crucified one.

He sends them: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you!” This sending is passed on: from Father, to Jesus, to his followers; and to enable this, he breathed on them: “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Just as God gave life to humanity by breathing life at the beginning of creation, now new life is given by the risen Jesus. The risen Lord is the giver of the Spirit and the initiator of the new creation, the establishment of a new people of God.

The purpose of this new people of God is to bestow the forgiveness Jesus expressed on the cross and in the resurrection; but it is also to challenge those who see no need for forgiveness. Verse 23: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” So the purpose is to bestow forgiveness and to restore the failed, the sinful, and the unbeliever—is that not what the Thomas story is all about?

It begins with those who “have seen the Lord” reaching out to the one who refuses to see. (This may be what our proposed home groups can do in the closeness of fellowship—restore hope, restore relationships, restore faith.) This story of restoration and the renewing of Thomas's place among the believers points us to the need for a faith which does not see, which does not need to have visible proof. (Rather, the faith needs people who will live out Jesus' new life.)

Resurrection is not just about Jesus being alive again, being back from the dead. Resurrection is a challenge to our ability, with the help of the Spirit, to restore, forgive and renew those around us.

The story of Peter and the apostles, from the *Acts of the Apostles*, points to the experience of the early Christians and is similar to the Thomas story. Jesus is raised and exalted, to give repentance and forgiveness. The disciples are witnesses, with the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.

It seems that the continuing series of resurrection stories is tied in with a growing awareness and increasing dependence on the life of the Spirit. This time of Resurrection, through Ascension (exaltation), to Pentecost is a time of transition, as the Lord becomes present to his followers in an entirely new way. The Lord is present *to* his followers; then the Lord is present *in* and *through* his followers!

In our story today, the disciples experience the presence of the risen Jesus. In restoring Thomas, the Lord becomes real to him also. As the Lord is real to the believers, so too will he become real to the world around.

How can the risen Lord be more real to us?—in prayer, in reading and meditation on the scriptures, in worship, in communion, and in companionship in the church family. (It is this last area that we hope to encourage by the establishment of one or two home groups.)

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.