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(Sermon from The Anglican Church of St Philip's O'Connor, Canberra, ACT, Australia)

APRIL 18 SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

What experiences have reassured you in time of doubt?

What has given you peace in time of great fear?

As I ponder the answer to these questions, I can only say the loving presence of Christ.

BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW!

Was it the adding together of supportive friends with prayer and acceptance, reading some encouraging words, a personal encounter with God? I don't know!

A still small voice?

A peaceful moment...?

But when I look back there is the recollection that in each case peace and reassurance come from the awareness of God's closeness.

The disciples had every reason to be afraid — after all, having killed Jesus, they might now want to wipe out his followers!

Evening/ The first day/ doors locked for fear of the Jews.

Jesus among them!

Peace be with you — Shalom, — the familiar greeting — they rejoiced.

Mordecai Vanunu — 18 years in jail encouraged and reassured and loved by Fr David Smith (St John's Darlinghurst)

Recall a note or a card — how encouraging; how helpful. Familiar things!

Jesus' presence brings "Peace".

But there is more!

As the Father sends me, so I send you.

So as well as overcoming doubt and fear, there is the sending out with the message of forgiveness — empowered by the Holy Spirit, breathed on them by Jesus.

The similarity between elements of this story and the one from Acts 2 where the disciples receive the Holy Spirit have many people believing that this is John's version of the same account!

The Risen Christ bestows the Holy Spirit.

But there is one missing — Thomas

And so there is also another story about Pastoral Care:

as the disciples seek out Thomas

and Evangelism:

as the report "We have seen the Lord."

Pastoral Care — the word came from the shepherd's care of the flock and express the care of Christ for his followers which filters down via Bishops and Priests and Deacons (hopefully) to our awareness of and care for each other.

The disciples are concerned that Thomas is missing from their midst and has not experienced the reassurance and peace of the Lord.

So often today, if people are missing, we find it difficult to be concerned because there are always other call's on people's time

— it is difficult being a pastor!

— but I/we must try because it is at the heart of our Christian caring.

—How can we do it better?

The other part of the story of the disciples and Thomas is this one of evangelism bringing Good News — because that is what it means! Here is "We have seen the Lord".

The good news (I believe) is always grounded in our experience — it is not slogans or doctrinal statements — it is what we know to be true!

In this same gospel of John is the story of the man born blind. When asked about what happened and who healed him, he said 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I **do** know, that though I was blind, now I see.</>

In that story, the word for see is Bleppo (Βλεπω) which means to physically see. However, in the story of the disciples and Thomas, the word used is eorakemen (εορακαμεν) from orao οραω which has a deeper meaning than just to see! It means to see with understanding!

And so, the disciples might well be telling Thomas we have seen the Lord and now we understand

something more!

They have seen with their eyes but also they have gained insight.

Evangelism must be an expression of what we see and know. ... what I know of Christ is this ....

Well, a week later — the same thing happens; the Risen Lord stands among them and Thomas who once needed physical proof is moved to faith.

His faith is renewed / He is reassured

Peace is also his, from the Lord.

And we are told that the purpose of the telling of the story is to encourage, to reassure those who do NOT see.

Going back to the beginning, Thomas is not able to **see** because he is not there, but he is brought to see because the disciples **care**

and are willing to tell him the good news to be an **evangelist**

We are called to care and to talk about our faith in terms of our experience — what we know!

Christ is Risen Christ is Here!