

Second Sunday of Easter

Sermon Text – John 20:31

Theme: “*That you may have life*”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

It seems that many people today try to turn God’s Word into an instruction book for daily living. Without doubt there is great, godly wisdom that comes from the Holy Scriptures, but the Bible was never meant to be a book of instructions or a text book to answer all of life’s questions.

John makes it very clear that the purpose of his book, and this is really true of the whole Bible, is not to write down a history of everything that Jesus ever did, but that his readers may know who Jesus is, that they may believe in him, and that by believing they may have life in his name.

Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The unity of Christ’s one body

The readings for today, the second Sunday of Easter all point to the blessed unity that is to characterise the Christian life. Not that Christians in and of themselves have things any more together than anyone else in society. But through Christ, the divisions that force us apart are mended so we shift from being self-centred to be Christ-centred, which in turn frees us to care for others.

In Luke’s history of the early church, he records in Acts that those who believed “were of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). In the earliest church, the people shared a common faith based on the teachings and saving grace of Jesus which was enacted in his death on the cross. Many people were eyewitnesses to both Jesus’ teaching and his crucifixion. Now many were also trusted eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection and those who put their faith in the promises of God as foretold in the Scriptures shared this common faith and supported each other in their belief. And because there was common belief it made sense to share freely the things God had already given them so that all those who were in need were able to share from the common riches of all the believers.

What mattered was no longer the ‘things’ accumulated by individuals, but that all people were able to share and that no one went without the things they needed for daily living. There doesn’t seem to be any question as to whether there would be sufficient. As needs arose, those who had possessions sold them so the money could be used in common.

It’s interesting if we stop to consider what our attitude is to giving in today’s church. Some might argue that we don’t seem to trust in God enough because who would sell off their house today and entrust the money to the church to distribute to those who have need? But I think this is too narrow a view. Luke begins this section with the news that the *full number*, that is everyone who believed was of one heart and soul. So what comes first is the unity in the body of Christ and from this flows a natural inclination to support the work of the church, rather than horde money away because a particular individual thinks they know best.

So when I consider the giving of the members of our congregation and I match that against the money we need to do the work we have set out to do, I see that we are indeed putting our resources together as the one body to support the needs of our congregation. It’s for this reason that we as a congregation are stepping out in faith and courage in God by planning to do more this year. We trust in God to provide through the giving and support of one another.

Today’s psalm is Psalm 133 and the theme is once more unity. The psalmist encourages us today with his words, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity” (v1). He compares it to the precious oil running down the beard of Aaron, over the collar of his robes. We hear this today and I can’t help but think of Sonja’s reaction to precious oil running over my beard and then over my collar. I know what she’d be saying. First – “Buy a razor and have a shave.” Second – “How do you think I’m going to get that stain out!” The language and the images used in the Bible are sometimes hard for us to appreciate, but by working with them we see the many blessings of God in new ways. The precious oil was

used to consecrate that which was holy to God. In other words, when God's children, when you brothers and sisters work together, God consecrates your work as holy and pleasing to him. Through our unified work, we bring God's blessings into both our congregation but most importantly into the community God has called us to serve.

The gift of life

In the second of our readings today, the Apostle John is putting into words the very thing that is almost impossible to describe - life. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made known... which was with the Father." John is describing the person of Jesus who is the embodiment of life itself. And not just everyday life but indeed eternal life (1 Jn 1:2). John is describing Jesus in such terms in order that we may join together with the other witnesses in the fellowship of faith and as we do so, our joy may be complete.

John continues with the familiar theme of light versus darkness. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Just as light is as far as it is possible to be from darkness, so God is that far from evil. John reminds us that we don't have to walk in the darkness. We are children of the light, we are God's children and so as long as we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another and it is the blood of Jesus, God's own Son that cleanses us from sin.

Understand the strength this gives you as God's children. You do not stand alone – you do not struggle alone. Instead together we walk *in the light as God's children, all of the one holy family*. So even if Satan is at work in the dark, trying to stir up trouble for us, we have nothing to fear because *we are in the light and the light will always drive away the darkness*.

Which leads us back to the close of today's gospel reading. Jesus' disciples were certainly unified immediately after his crucifixion. They were hiding together, afraid of the Jews. Surely having seen what had happened to their teacher and leader, they were expecting a similar fate. But into their timid midst Jesus appears and his first words were, "Peace be with you." What relief and joy for the disciples. Death has been replaced with life. And the first act of passing on this good news is meet with its natural reaction. Thomas is told the good news and he doesn't believe but he doubts. "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails...I will never believe."

Thomas wants *proof* before he is prepared to believe. When Jesus next appears to his disciples, including Thomas, his answer is now, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus then encourages all who are to follow Thomas' confession of faith, "Have you believed because you have seen me? *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*. If you believe, that's you – blessed by God.

Jesus provided proof to his closest followers and they have written down their testimony so we too may have this proof to hold on to. There is little that seems to make sense concerning Jesus' death and resurrection, yet with absolute faith and trust cling to this good news and the promise this contains – life. Just as Jesus was raised to new life, you too have already been raised to new life through your baptism. Now, because you are joined with Jesus into his one body, just as he was resurrected to life after his death, so you will be resurrected to life after your mortal body has died.

The Bible isn't an instruction manual for living the life God has given you but it does tell the story of who God is, who you really are and that you have a Saviour who died in your place so you may inherit eternal life in Jesus' name.

And may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep guard over your hearts and minds in your risen Lord Jesus. Amen.