

**Sermon:** Stop doubting and believe

**Reading:** John 20:19-31

**Introduction:**

As we live in a multi cultural age with so much information, we know much more today about other cultures and faiths than we have ever done. This often prompts a question which goes something like this - "If I was born in Pakistan, I would probably be a Muslim, If I was born in India I would likely be a Hindu, being born in the UK I became a Christian, therefore are all religions worshipping the same God, otherwise it seems unfair, because I live in the West and hear about Jesus that I am saved just because of where I was born?"

This is an interesting question which comes in many different connotations and I remember wrestling with this question myself.

Some suggest a simplistic answer saying, God loves everyone and these different religions have so much in common such as, they all have places to worship God, they pray, follow religious texts and generally live out their lives in a way that pleases their God therefore conclude all religious roads ultimately will lead to God.

But is this correct? What do you think?

The two passages today one from King David who penned the wonderful 23rd Psalm and the gospel of John sets before us an answer to this perplexing question and it all centres on the evening of that first day.

**Evening of the First Day**

The disciples are in 'lockdown,' hiding behind closed doors in fear. Sitting in silence, crushed under their own guilt and ashamed of how they responded when Jesus was arrested.

Breaking through the tense silence, Jesus suddenly stands among them saying, 'Peace be with you'.

Eyes red with tears and filled with shame the disciples look up in startled amazement and disbelief. Is this my imagination? Is grief simply playing with me? But everyone also sees Jesus standing here among us and we hear his words piercing the silence.

Jesus looking upon them, finds them distressed, fearful, lost, bewildered and like sheep without their shepherd. With such gentleness and kindness our Lord speaks to those whom have followed him over these last three years, and what wonderful words they hear.

"Peace be with you"

We never hear Jesus speak unintentionally or lightly. Every word that proceeded from the mouth of Jesus was intentional, purposeful, meaningful and filled with truth and with blessing for those who have ears to hear. "Peace be with you".

In fear and trembling the disciples are ashamed to look fully at Jesus, afraid to catch his eye and yet afraid not to look, wondering, how can this be?

These words of peace are not simply a greeting but a state of heart and mind which Jesus is inviting them into.....

This is peace not restlessness

This is peace not fear

This is peace not finger pointing

This is peace not blame

This is Peace not rebuke and so Jesus says again, "Peace be with you". Repeated verses in scripture are always worthy of our undivided attention.

Knowing their doubting minds he reveals to them his hands and side. The scars, real but no longer bleeding, bruised, swollen or infected. Scars visible, undeniable, now painless - these are scars are resurrected scars. A body no longer in pain, not broken and torn apart but holy, divine, living and physically present. The scars visible speaking of the sacrifice of the Lamb that was slain.

Luke wonderfully records Jesus assuring words to his doubting disciples to touch him and see that he is real. He is no illusion, no ghost or apparition. Jesus is no disembodied spirit but is gloriously resurrected. Jesus even invites them to share food to assure them a ghost does not eat. His body is real, glorious and eternal.

Christianity is not an unreasonable faith as some think it is, claiming it is based on blind faith. This couldn't be further from the truth. Peter in his letter writes, 'We are not following cleverly devised fables' (2 Peter 1:16).

We have a faith based and founded on eye witness testimonies.

John in his first letter writes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen, which we have gazed upon and touched with our own hands (1 John 1:1).

This Jesus is alive.

### **Doubters remain**

However not all the disciples were present in the room when Jesus appeared. Jewish Law requires two witnesses for a testimony to be accounted. In the locked room there were at least 10 present and could have been more, if their wives and children were also present.

Thomas for some unknown reason was not with the disciples when Jesus appeared. When the disciples caught up with Thomas they excitedly informed him that they have seen the risen Lord, they couldn't wait to share the Good News. As we know, Thomas didn't believe them, probably thinking them to be delusional.

In his doubts Thomas stipulates he will not believe unless he sees the 'nail marks in Jesus hands and put my finger where the nails where'. Even this is not enough for then he goes on to say, '(A)nd put my hand into his side'.

This account provides strong internal evidence for the reliability of the account as Thomas could not believe on a simple testimony alone, for he needed to be convinced. Who could blame him, he saw Jesus crucified and knew he was dead.

It was a week later when the disciples were gathered together again. The doors once again locked only this time Thomas was with them. Just as before Jesus stood among them and spoke to Thomas repeating back to him his very own words, 'See my hands, put your finger where the nails have been, reach out and put your hand in my side. Stop

doubting and believe'. (Jn 20:27). Thomas falls to his knees and proclaims, "My Lord and my God' (Jn 20:28)

Then Jesus tells them blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.

### **What about other religions?**

I began this message with the question asked the frequently asked question concerning other cultures and their religions and what this passage reveals to us.

When the disciples encountered the risen Jesus we are presented with a number of facts that we cannot simply dismiss or meld with other cultural belief systems even if we say, contradictory convictions.

- 1) Because of Easter we know Christmas is true. We worship The Incarnate One. Other religions attempt to walk up the mountain to meet with God under the heavy burdens and obligations their faiths require of them, whereas our God has come down, stepping into his own creation, revealing himself in Christ Jesus. John tells us, 'In the beginning was the Word'.... and that the 'Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us' (Jn 1:1; 14). Colossians 1:15 puts it this way, 'The Son is the image of the invisible God'.
- 2) Resurrection, reincarnation, karma, soul sleep etc are various beliefs presented in other religious and cults. They are very different states of being after we take our final breath in this world. They cannot be compatible with each other, therefore not all can be true. Truth is truth. Those who belong to Christ will be resurrected, not reincarnated. The two are very different. Jesus resurrected so will we.
- 3) Just because I was brought up in particular country doesn't mean I will be a Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian etc. After all in the UK many people would not call themselves Christian today, an increasing number in the West now call themselves, atheists or nones (no religious belief). So the home nation doesn't necessarily dictate your belief.
- 4) Jesus declared in John's Gospel that, 'He is the Way, the Truth and the Life and no one gets to the Father except through Him'. (John 14:6). Truth is truth, no matter how many want to dismiss it, large numbers dismissing the truth does not make it untrue! Truth is truth. Truth is not a philosophy, a way of life or belief system but a person - Jesus.

There have been many teachers claiming to have the answers to life and what happens beyond this earthly veil and religions have grown up around these teachers/teachings, for example.....

Buddhists follow the teachings of Buddha

Sikhs follow the teaching of Guru Nanak and the writings of the Ten Gurus

Chinese culture follow the philosophy of Confucius

Muslims follow the writings and teachings of Mohammad

The founder of Taoism Laozi, Zoroastrianism founder of Zoroaster,

Christians follow the teachings of Jesus

But there is a major difference between all of these belief systems and the Christian faith. If we weren't in a lock down and we could still freely travel, then we could go to.....

India and see where the remains of Buddha's ashes are scattered

Pakistan to see where the body of Guru Nanak lies

China to find the resting place of Confucius

Medina in Saudi Arabia to discover the grave of Mohammad

All these religious leaders and teachers are still in their tombs.

However if we traveled to the Holy Sepulchra, we will find a tomb cut into a hill side where they lay the body of Jesus after they had taken him down from the cross.

The tomb was sealed with a huge rock and covered with a Roman seal. Soldiers were appointed to ensure no one came in or out! But on the Third Day the stone was rolled away and the soldiers fled in fear. For Jesus rose as he said he would.

Jesus appeared not just to the ten in the upper room but also to Thomas who doubted and then to over 500 people over a period of 40 days and to many others ever since the resurrection including St. Paul and many of the Saints.

The important question is this. If Jesus rose from the grave did he also make a different way for other faiths to follow? The answer of course is no, but Jesus did give his followers a great commission, 'Go into all of the world and make disciples of ALL nations, teaching them everything I have taught you' (Matthew 28)

With these wonderful words ringing in their ears, the disciples went forth in a land that was often hostile to Christianity but the truth can not remain silent.....

"Because I live, you also will live"

**(John 14:19)**

Jesus death was necessary, he was to take our sins upon himself in order to make the atonement required by the Law. The question of many ways to God is to misunderstand the nature of the atonement. Jesus did not provide one way for those born in the UK and a different way for those born in Pakistan, the same way is true for all the world. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son' (Jn 3:16). Jesus death on the cross paid the price for my sins, making the atonement necessary in order that I could be reconciled back to God, and have the debt of my sins cancelled - When Jesus cried out on the cross, "It is finished" that is exactly what he means for my sins.

Becoming a Christian brings us into a living relationship with God who is working out his amazing plan. For the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want, he makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul. He guides me along right paths for his names sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Jesus has provided one way for lost souls to be united to God and it is through repentance and faith in the atoning work of Christ. In completing this He calls us to follow Him and enter into a living relationship with Him today.

*Living, he loved me; dying He saved me; buried, he carried my sins far away, rising He justified freely for ever: One day He's returning, O what a glorious day.*

**Amen.**