

John 20:19-31: *Thomas, who is not present at the first appearance of Jesus to the disciples, is confronted with the Risen Christ, and invited to put his doubts to rest. He responds by affirming his faith in the Risen One.*

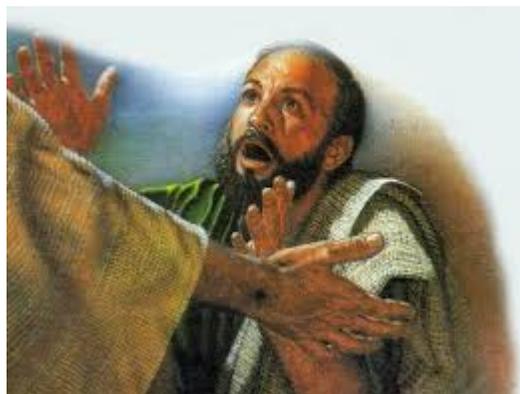
When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 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. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

But these 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.



COCU32C READINGS

In a world of cynicism and suffering, it can be tempting to see celebration as something flippant, irrelevant and heartless. However, in the light of the resurrection, and in witness to Christ, celebration takes on a prophetic character. This week as we continue to remember the resurrection of Christ and the life it brings, we are also called to the prophetic work of celebration.

This week's Gospel reading naturally draws us to reflect on doubt and faith, but the other readings encourage a slightly different approach, with a focus on the proclamation of praise and celebration. It may be that we make far more of Thomas's doubt than Jesus does. The point of the story, after all, is Thomas' shift to faith – not his doubt.

If we choose to focus on praise and celebration, however, the readings for this week are both inspiring and deeply challenging, in terms of our witness for Christ. In the Acts passage, it is the faith and determination of the disciples to worship Jesus, that makes them so bold in the face of the threats from the religious leaders. It is the worship of the Psalmist – and of the people and creatures that respond to the call to praise – that provides the celebration at the end of the Psalter, bringing all of the lament, grief, pain and suffering of the Psalms into a moment of final celebration. In Revelation, it is John's worship of Jesus, and his faith in the Risen One, that moves him to write about his vision of hope and grace in the final consummation of Jesus' saving work. And, in the Gospel, Thomas' journey into faith becomes an example for the Gospel's readers to follow, and invites people of faith into a life of celebration and of witness to the resurrection.

In light of this, the call of the Lectionary for this week is for us to respond to God's saving work in Christ, and in his resurrection, with celebration which then inspires and strengthens us to witness to Christ and Christ's way, even when we face persecution and suffering for Christ's sake.

May our worship be celebrative and our celebration be prophetic as we gather this week.

(John van de Laar, Sacredise)

Psalm 150: *The closing song of the Psalter calls God's people to praise, and to express the praise through all kinds of musical instruments.*

Praise the Lord! Praise God in the sanctuary;

praise God in the mighty firmament!

Praise God for mighty deeds;

praise God according to such surpassing greatness!

Praise God with trumpet sound;

praise God with lute and harp!

Praise God with tambourine and dance;

praise God with strings and pipe!

Praise God with clanging cymbals;

praise God with loud clashing cymbals!

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

Revelation 1:4-8: *John's introduction to the Revelation, praises Jesus as the resurrected witness, the one who has given us life, and who is God eternal.*

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

"The greeting of peace is not insignificant. The revelator writes during the Pax Romana, a time of "peace" only if you were the favoured and privileged of the Roman Empire, which the early Christians were not. Indeed, peace would have been hard for Christians to come by if solicited from the Empire."

(Keegan Osinski, A Plain Account, 2016)

Was Bob Dylan correct in his assessment that "You gotta serve somebody"?

Ancient people could imagine no alternative. Modern believers are wise to take that testimony seriously. In proclaiming Christ as a king whose very blood creates a new kingdom of priests, Revelation imagines an alternative to the powers that lay claim upon us. Christ's lordship judges all other would-be authorities. It also marks Christ's followers as holy people within a new community. *(Greg Carey)*

Acts 5:27-32: *The apostles, who were previously arrested and were freed from prison by an angel, are arrested again for refusing to stop preaching about Jesus, and when challenged declare that they must obey God rather than human beings.* When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

The apostles refused to stop talking about how God resurrected Jesus. This episode marks the second time that some religious leaders and Sadducees arrested, detained, and interrogated the apostles for preaching the resurrection of Jesus. Previously, Peter and John were imprisoned because the same religious authorities were "much annoyed" at their preaching Jesus' resurrection (4:1-4). and were eventually released by the council. This time "an angel of the Lord" discharges them (v.19). And when brought before the Council, they again declare their resolve to privilege the voice of God over human authority. Sometimes following God's voice versus human authority means risking institutional approval. The only reason the Temple police did not violently arrest the apostles was because they feared the mass protests. If it were not for the willingness of the people, the masses, to disrupt injustice, to protest, the apostles would have been the fatal victims of police brutality. When injustice and oppression permeate religious, social, and political systems, nothing short of mass activism will transform them. *(Commentary by Mitzi J Smith, Working Preacher)*

On the other hand....Hobart street preacher David Gee sets up a table in Hobart's streets, making the Bible available, and handing out tracts. The table often becomes a place for conversation. He also does street preaching. "That's what people don't like", says Presbyterian pastor Campbell Markham.

Samuel Mazur lodged an official complaint. "He is an atheist, who says he feels offended and insulted by what has been written and said. He has been hanging around the area for years", said Markham.

Mazur has withdrawn his complaint after making an agreement with the Hobart City council "to better regulate street preachers and the use of an area of Elizabeth Street mall designated as 'speakers corner'," the Hobart Mercury reports. The paper quotes Mazur as saying: "I just wanted to reach a negotiated outcome that ensured no harm was done to members of the public through hate (anti gay) speech." *(Eternity News)*