

Sermon for Second Sunday of Easter, April 19th 2020

Stuart Vince

I looked at my diary on this computer as I sat to write this, and it still has all the events and commitments that I had BC – Before Corona. It reinforced just how quickly our world has changed and how the expectations within my life have moved and evolved in the past few weeks. It makes me wonder just how different our lives will be when the world begins to move away from the need for physical separation and physical isolation.

Change in our lives caused by what is happening around us may be gradual or it may be sudden. We are suffering from the impact of the evolution of a new virus and the whole world has changed as we struggle to control this contagion. A sudden change. We have also been suffering from the impact of climate change – a warming of our world that started in the 19th century. A slow gradual change. What strikes me is that we, mankind, humanity, appear to have been the instrument of change in both these sets of circumstances that are having such dramatic affects upon us all.

We change our climate because of our lifestyle. We choose to live in a way that uses too much energy and too many resources. We measure our success by earnings and possessions, both on a personal level and on a national level. There is an assumption that we fail if we do not achieve economic growth, but economic growth means using more of our world's natural resources. The virus evolved from animals to infect humans because of the way wild animals were sold in China. Again, a lifestyle choice that has had life threatening consequences for all on our planet.

Our gospel reading today shows how the followers of Jesus experienced a massive change in their lives after the trauma of seeing their leader, their Messiah, put to death as a criminal on Good Friday. It is the evening of the first day of the week. On the dawning of this same day John describes Mary Magdalene discovering the empty tomb and meeting the risen Jesus. The disciples are frightened – they are hiding in a locked room. You can imagine the confusion, the conversations, as they try to make sense of what Mary has been telling them. 'The Lord is risen from the dead. He has come back to us.' I would think the level of scepticism and disbelief was high at what Mary, a woman, not their equal as a man, was saying to them.

Then Jesus appears to them. Not only does he appear to them, he empowers them with the Holy Spirit and commissions them to heal and forgive sins in his name. They are changed in an instant. Their lives are completely turned upside down. They are made different in what and how they do things by Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

What can our gospel say to us in this period of rapid enforced change in our world? Firstly, if we say that we are followers of Jesus then let us also be believers. Thomas doubted and lacked belief until the resurrection was proved to him by the physical presence of Jesus. We need to build a greater trust and faith in the words of Jesus than Thomas showed. We must believe in the resurrection of Jesus so that He can live in our lives. Secondly Jesus left us a great gift. He sends us his Holy Spirit to be with us, to lead and empower us to follow and put into action the teachings of Jesus. Thirdly, Jesus places a duty upon his disciples to work for him, to forgive and to heal in his name. If we do believe in the living Lord, then we must follow his instructions by working for him in our lives. We might not have the powers of physical healing given us by the Holy Spirit, but we have the Love of Jesus to share.

How should we behave in this changed world that we are experiencing now? Read today's Psalm, Psalm 16, and I think that you will find that you have been given a good idea of what we should be doing. It is a prayer that was written many years before Jesus came into the world, but it is still a relevant prayer for us 2000 years after Jesus lived and died. If we take refuge in our God, if we keep God always before us, then we will live in his Love, the Love that Jesus taught us about and showed on the cross. If we live with God and God's Love, then we cannot help but show it to the world in which we live and serve others.

If we do show those around us how God loves them, then we will change the way that they perceive their lives and show them what is truly important. What is important is not the economic growth that the world has used as a measure of success. Not the increase in national or personal wealth that so many of us have striven for without due regard for the effects that the striving has caused on God's world. We can show by our example that lifestyle change is possible, and we can treat God's world with respect. Let us be more trusting than Thomas and truly believe that Jesus is risen, and his Holy Spirit is here with us now. Let us accept the commission that Jesus gives his disciples, and through the power of the Spirit serve in this changed world by keeping God before us in all that we do.