

John 20. 19-31

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.

There are times when you simply cannot just read a passage of the gospel of John, you simply have to close your eyes and watch.

Disciples, full of fear and behind very closed doors, someone on watch perhaps. Evening time, dark maybe or twilight – a time for seeing things in the shadows, especially when you're that scared and even the merest sound sounds like the enemy approaching. Maybe they'd been there a long time, since the morning, when the less than coherent news from Mary Magdelene about seeing Jesus and her telling them that had to wait for Jesus had been delivered. Now at evening, do they light lamps or sit in the darkness? I imagine you could have cut the atmosphere with a knife. Look at this Gospel from the moment that Jesus is led away to the moment that Peter and John race to the tomb. They did not see Jesus, Mary did. Peter has no speaking role in these dialogues nor does he until he is told by Jesus to feed the sheep – and even then he is still cussid. So where are these men of God sitting? Where is Peter, where John, Andrew and James? In dark corners skulking or arguing or, more likely, full of recrimination and unspoken anger at themselves and each other.

In this spiritual and physical gloom the Man arrives. Much has been made of the fact that the doors were locked. Maybe. Or maybe common sense prevails and He knocks at the locked door (in true Holman Hunt fashion) and they tentatively open it. In comes the light and says 'Peace be with you.'

Whether He suddenly appeared or knocked on the door there are times when the mischief of the Man is breath-taking. Said in all sincerity – yet how can He not have anticipated the chaos that would have ensued? Peace?! Anything but. How do they react? Backing off to the wall sides or fainting? Quaking with fear at seeing a ghost? 'Jesus Christ!' Got it in one. Jesus has to prove the death to prove the -resurrection - He shows them the marks. Remember how often the evangelists say that Jesus wasn't recognised? If you've ever seen someone glassed or who's gone through a windscreen or been beaten up you'll know you cannot always see their features. Bodies are sometimes unrecognisable in death they are so transfigured. Only when they had had it shown to them or when, as with Mary earlier He speaks the name, is it evident who He is. And once the penny drops 'they rejoiced'. Total, total understatement. I bet someone said 'shut up the Jews will hear us' and I bet someone got told to shut up themselves! 'Rejoiced'? ... and some. Whoops, hugs, slaps on

the back - 'don't touch me there, still sore...' Look at this scene with your own eyes and think how you would react. Utter joy. Seeing someone you didn't have the courage to see crucified back from the dead - the *dead* that is, not just off on a journey to visit the folks, but dead. How many of us that have been in grief thought we have seen the one we love only to be hurt again by the realization this isn't possible? And here is Jesus alive and well and showing his 'operation scars'.

In comedy terms this is the relief theory of comedy, after fear and trauma come relief that the worst has passed and we laugh. This is Hermione and Claudius from *Winter's Tale* and *Measure for Measure* all rolled into one.

'Peace be with you'. This now turns on a sixpence into a holy moment when Jesus speaks words of power, healing and forgiveness. Holding his mangled hands out in blessing, touching their heads and holding their faces in blessing, speaking deep words in blessing. What happened next John doesn't say but he moves us on to poor old Thomas. Yet there must have been tears of repentance and sorrow as well as joy. Of touches of forgiveness and long hugs of loving reconciliation. Deep gazing into eyes and souls and utter newness of thought – for this was more than Lazarus, this was the Messiah.