

Sunday 12 April – Second Sunday of Easter

Sermon by Sue Lyne

An audio recording of the sermon from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk). Due to holidays this will not be available until after 24 April.

It's strange when you think about it – the disciples spend the evening of Easter Day behind locked doors. Peter and another disciple have seen the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene has spoken with the risen Christ, and she has told the disciples about it. You'd think they would be off celebrating, announcing to anyone who would listen that Jesus is alive again. Instead, they hide out. They act like disciples whose leader is dead.

On the other hand, protecting themselves makes perfect sense. It was only a couple days before that they were traumatized by the death of their leader on a cross. They know that as he was apprehended and executed, so they may be as well. And so, they wait behind locked doors, as quiet as they can be, fearing every footstep in the street below. And several of them will die, sooner or later, for their connection with Jesus. This room contains many of the first Christian martyrs.

Whether or not their attitude is justified, it is apparent that fear dominates them. That puts them in the same group with so many other people. Those dominated by fear include many of the people we see around us every day and even some of us here this morning. These disciples have plenty of company on the evening of the first Easter Day when fear keeps them inside a locked room.

It is to his fearful disciples that the risen Christ chooses to appear. He has passed from life through a gruesome death to a life greater than we can imagine. Why does he appear to such as these?

Might it be out of anger, disappointment, or a desire for revenge. After all, these disciples deserted him. As he hung for hours on the cross, most of them were nowhere to be found. He might have wanted to fix them with a steely gaze and chew them over.

But nothing of the sort happens. He comes back, not concerned for himself, but for them. He senses their profound fear. So, he speaks his

peace to them. He shows them his wounds, still apparent on his glorified body. Their fear dissolves, and they rejoice to see him alive again.

Then he gives them his peace and their mission. He breathes the Holy Spirit on them and tells them to forgive sins with his authority.

This action is a second creation, an early Pentecost, a commissioning of them for ministry. Their business is to be forgiveness, the reconciliation of humanity with God and each other. The prototype for their work is to be the forgiveness he has given them. From this upstairs room, forgiveness is to spread like wildfire. Set free from fear themselves, they are to help set others free.

Is it remarkable that death could not hold Jesus? Yes! Is it remarkable that fear could not hold his disciples? Yes!

What's in it for us? The promise of our own resurrection at the end of time, and the reality of reconciliation with God and other people here and now. Like the first disciples, we experience Jesus risen from the dead, freeing us from fear of the death that will come at life's end, and freeing us from all the other deathly fears that blight our lives today.

What are these fears we experience? Some are announced in the headlines: illnesses for which no cure is known, a faltering economy, wars and rumours of wars. Other fears are more personal, more private: a bad medical report, a broken marriage, a career that crashes.

We feel fear when there's no money to pay the mortgage. When our child's report card is a disaster. When we come back to find our home broken into, our possessions rifled.

When fears flare up in our hearts, it's easy to forget God, but it's time to remember God.

The disciples forgot for a time, there in that upstairs room. We may forget also, but Christ does not forget us. He comes to us with vivid reminders in his feet and hands and side that death, the source of so much fear, has been conquered.

The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. And we also can rejoice, when amid fears, we recognize Christ here with us. It is not that fear is simply swept away; rather, fear no longer dominates our lives. There is one

who has shown himself more powerful, and he is who we acknowledge as Lord.

The resurrection stories that conclude the four gospels are a bit of a scramble, testifying to how people come to faith in different ways.

So, the beloved disciple believes when he sees the empty tomb, but it's not clear just what he believes.

Mary Magdalene believes when the Lord speaks her name, even though, according to Mark's Gospel, her report is not accepted.

The disciples believe for themselves once Jesus appears alive among them.

People come to faith in different ways. They did then. They do now.

Still another example is Thomas. Do you remember this Thomas? Earlier in the gospel story, as Jesus prepares to go to Jerusalem to face the cross, Thomas says, with a note of bravado, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." There's nothing subtle about this guy.

And so, when he hears from others that Jesus is back again, he makes his outrageous demand. He refuses to believe that Jesus is alive unless he can see and touch the wounds of his crucified leader.

Then one week later, today, Thomas gets his chance there in the upstairs room. Jesus enters and invites Thomas to examine his wounds. We don't hear that he accepts the invitation. We hear instead the boldest statement about Jesus in the Gospel of John, maybe the entire New Testament. "My Lord and my God!" shouts Thomas.

Jesus returns to promise us our resurrection. He comes back to reconcile us with God and make us instruments for reconciliation in the world. He comes to break the chains of fear. And we have different ways of recognizing him.

You can meet Jesus in Scripture and in the Sacrament. You can meet him in the love shown to you by other Christians. You can meet him as well in the depths of your heart, even at times you least expect this.

Will you welcome him? Will you trust him? Jesus may come to you when you least expect it, as the angel came to Joseph in Egypt while he slept.

Jesus often startles us, as he did those disciples in the upstairs room, and one week later, Thomas. He may come to you where you least expect him, even the secret depths of your own soul.

Friends, this Easter Season Christ comes to set us free. We can extend to him the chains of fear that hold us, and he will break them by the power of his resurrection.

Amen