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*Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020 – Easter 2*

*Readings: Exodus 14:10-31, 15:20-21 & John 20:19-31*

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## **Exodus 14:10-31, 15:20-21**

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, "Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians"? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!'

Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.'

Then the angel of God, who had been travelling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other; so neither went near the other all night long.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, 'Let's get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.' Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians

were fleeing towards it, and the Lord swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen – the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them:

'Sing to the Lord,  
for he is highly exalted.  
Both horse and driver  
he has hurled into the sea.'

## **John 20:19-31**

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!'

But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'

Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'

Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

# Reflection

For many of us life has been turned upside down, with little time to process the changes. Many of our usual patterns, whether it is going to work, nursery, school, or college, are either gone completely, or changed profoundly. I feel especially sad for those in the “threshold” years, who are missing out on the celebrations and rituals associated with the end of junior or senior school, or even university. And it’s not just the pupils and parents who are struggling! One of my nieces is a school teacher in Scotland. She is grieving for her pupils; particularly the ones whose course work has been lacklustre, but who have been working really hard to pull up their grades. She can only assess them on what they have done. No exams to give them the opportunity of redemption. We mustn’t underestimate the emotional and mental cost of these “losses.”

The disciples’ apprenticeship with Jesus also came to a sudden and shocking end. For three years Jesus had been teaching them and getting them ready. But they hadn’t understood when Jesus explained to them what must happen. Even though he told them again and again, that he would suffer and die, they were totally unprepared for the events of Holy Week. As they listened to the cheers on Palm Sunday, they still had no idea how things would unfold.

John 20 takes us to the Upper Room, where the disciples were hiding away for fear of the Jewish leaders. Numb with shock and grief about Jesus, they were also terrified for themselves. Everyone knew they were Jesus’ followers. Would they share their Master’s fate? They’d left everything to follow him. What would happen to them now? They had barely begun to process the events of the previous week, when their emotions were thrown into turmoil yet again. First the women came with news the tomb was open and Jesus’ body missing. Then Peter and the other disciple looked and saw the linen grave cloths, but “still did not understand...that Jesus had to rise from the dead.” No doubt they were talking about these things when Jesus suddenly appeared in the room.

Through locked doors. As if that was normal! (I’d have jumped out of my skin if I’d been there!) No wonder Jesus said, “Peace be with you!” Their hearts must have been pounding with excitement, maybe fear, maybe disbelief... until Jesus showed them his hands and his feet; the scars that proved it really was him. Yes, Jesus had died. But now he clearly was fully and wonderfully ALIVE! And John writes in a rather understated way, “The disciples were overjoyed.”

But they still had so much to understand. And Jesus didn’t waste any time.

First, he commissioned them. John 20:21: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you!” In other words, it’s not over. Yes, it’s different to what you expected, but it’s not over. THIS is what I’ve been preparing you for – to continue the work I began! You CAN do it! This isn’t the time to hide away! Go out and spread the word!

Next, Jesus empowered them. Verse 22: “He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Just as God once breathed life into Adam and Eve; Genesis 2:7 (See also Ezekiel 37, when God made breath enter the army of dry bones, so that they came to life and sprang to their feet). I just sense some of you are feeling weary; spiritually, physically and emotionally exhausted by recent events. Flattened by the rollercoaster ride that is Covid-19. You are like that heap of dry bones. Jesus says to you, “Peace. Be whole again.” It may feel that your life is in pieces; that you have nothing to look forward to. With God there is always hope of new life. God wants to take the scattered fragments of your life and remodel them. Trust him. And let him fill you afresh with his Holy Spirit. Frankly we all need Jesus to do this for us. For it was the Holy Spirit that gave the disciples the courage and the energy to leave that upper room; to go out and spread the Good News.

And if we needed proof that change was possible, look at Thomas. The one who wasn't there on Jesus' first visit. The one who “missed out” when Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into them (and there's nothing worse than that feeling that you've missed out!) The one who wanted proof before he believed. Interestingly, the doors were still closed against the outside world, but again that didn't stop Jesus. Before Thomas had a chance to say anything, Jesus pre-empted him, using the exact words that Thomas had used when Jesus wasn't there. Come and touch me Thomas! See for yourself that I am real! More than that, I know every word that falls from your lips! (cf Psalm 139:4, “Before a word is on my tongue, YOU LORD, know it completely!”) And Thomas indeed knew, without a single doubt, who Jesus was; “My Lord and my God!”

We can be sure of this. God sees and hears us in all our troubles. He wants to make us “whole” where we are broken. He wants to give us his peace and fill us with his Holy Spirit. Because he has a job for each of us to do. Not later, when all of this is over, but now. We are his witnesses to a world that badly needs him.

Peace be with you.

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