

The incident between Jesus and Thomas has been much used by preachers during the lock-down, given the setting where the disciples are in a lockdown situation themselves in a state of fear. It is not hard to visualise the scene: various bits of news of resurrection have come through – John and Peter had been to the tomb, the women also, Mary recounts her experience with the 'gardener'. Was it **possible**? Then Jesus appears from nowhere (the doors are locked), and there's a heady mixture of joy and fear. It did seem possible.

But Thomas wasn't there the first time, and he wanted **proof**. And he gets it with special treatment from Jesus. He was convinced without having to touch Jesus as He had suggested. Many folk still ask for proof today. Sadly our two daughters do not share our faith (we keep praying), and one, in conversation, stated 'I don't believe Jesus ever existed'. Of course we can't prove that He did, anymore than we can prove that Julius Caesar or Napoleon existed. All we can do is look at history and see the evidence that indicates that they lived – the battles, the coinage, the inscriptions. And in the case of Jesus, the changed lives, the people who down the ages have experienced Him. Murderers who have become pastors, drug addicts who have kicked their habit, and people so convinced that He was and is still alive that they'll die rather than deny it.

And what does Jesus bring? So often when He appeared to His followers He says '**Peace**'. They're worried sick, they're frightened, they're puzzled – and He says 'Peace'. And that peace is not just a shallow blessing, but a 'shalom' - a deep sense of well-being and harmony and forgiveness and being right with God. And so many today suffer from stress, and mental illness is high on the agenda with all the worry of lockdown, job insecurity, and all the other problems brought on by the pandemic. Our modern Western life, which offers so much in terms of material things, seems to put pressure on people. (And it's not just outside – we find it in the church too, sadly). But so often people are looking in the wrong place for solutions. Magazines, books, programmes on radio and television talk of 'Body, Mind and Spirit', (Libraries and bookshops have shelves of material in this section), but in this PC world no-one suggests faith in Jesus might help or be the answer. I have seen lots of articles about how to cope with lockdown – from walking to video games, from needlework to yoga – but nothing about reading a bible or praying to God. Jesus offered peace, and He still does. And, as Paul puts it, it's a peace that passes all understanding.

Jesus' resurrection is possible, lives prove it, and when we believe we receive His peace. But it doesn't end there. Jesus said 'I am sending you' – and they had a **purpose**. That purpose? To go and tell others about Jesus, His death and resurrection, and about the God who loves us and wants the best for us. We're living in a world (at least the Western world) where the majority of people under 50 have no concept of Christianity, don't know the bible, (It was Janet Bell, who some time ago in our pulpit told of the teacher who, when asked if the children were familiar with the Lord's Prayer, said 'What's the Lord's Prayer?'). Statistics show that 95% of children in the UK have no connection with church. 95%! Many folk only know Jesus as a swear word, and think of church as being for old women, and of no relevance to everyday life. We need to convince them otherwise. I know, and I'm sure you know, of folk who have gone through a crisis or even crises, who have said 'I couldn't have coped without my faith'. And people both young and old facing similar situations need to know this availability of help. So our purpose is to get this message across. For unless we tell folk about Jesus and what He means to us, they're not going to know - parents won't tell them, day school won't tell them, the media won't tell them. What an opportunity we have, in talking to people who are depressed, fed up, worried, because of the pandemic to tell them of a God who loves them, and cares for them, and will listen to their prayers. And we can tell them, not only by our words, but by our actions. One of the good things that has come out of this crisis is the way people have gone out of their way to help others.

And to those four Ps (**Possible, Proof, Peace, and Purpose**), let me add a fifth – **Power**. Because however inadequate we may feel, God will give us the power to believe, and believing, to witness for Him and serve Him. Throughout the bible people from Moses and Gideon to Peter and Paul have all felt inadequate, and always God has promised to be with them and be their guide and strength. And of course that means there is a sixth P – His **Presence**. And it's the same today. This is what our faith is all about.

Amen

