

Sermon
11 April 2021
West Kirk of Calder/Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: John 20:19-31

Overwhelmed.

If I had to choose 1 word to describe how I think the disciples must have felt on that very 1st Easter Sunday, I would choose “overwhelmed”.

Because honestly, they have been through so much...

They were all just living their lives, minding their own business, when Jesus walked into their lives and literally changed their whole existence.

They followed Jesus, and their ordinary lives became extraordinary.

Nothing was the same anymore, it's as if their eyes were opened to what life was really about, for the first time they could see what it meant to believe in God – they saw situations, places, people, change in front of their eyes – all because of the presence of Jesus.

Their mundane routine, of getting up, doing their jobs, going home, sleeping, and doing it all again the next day and the next day, all of sudden changed into something very exciting. No two days were the

same. They hung on Jesus' lips as he spoke and taught them, they saw miracles happen, their understanding of what life was really about changed completely.

And they grew close to each other. They got to know and love Jesus, and one another. They were in it together.

But despite everything they went through, they didn't fully grasp what Jesus came to do on earth.

And where *one* minute they all pledged to stay true to him, no matter what, the *next* one after the after deserted Jesus in his hour of need.

What was happening to Jesus was bigger than them, and although Jesus was trying to prepare them for what was to come, it was as if it all happened too fast.

Their leader, their teacher, their friend, was crucified. He died on a cross. He was buried in a tomb with a huge stone rolled in front of the entrance.

They must have been devastated...

Just to hear, 3 days later, that the stone was rolled away and Jesus wasn't there anymore.

What? What on earth happened? Where could he be? Did someone move his body?

And they were scared. Because the Jewish authorities literally got away with murder 3 days ago. They were probably next on the list.

So they sat, huddled together, behind a locked door. Consoling each other, trying to make sense of it all, wondering where to go from there.

Feeling overwhelmed.

When all of sudden Jesus appeared to them, and said: “Peace be with you!”, like he always did.

As if it was the most ordinary thing in the world to do.

They most certainly didn’t expect to see Jesus there, alive. And once this sank in, they surely must have felt overcome by shame – wondering: “When is he going to ask us: Why didn’t you stand by me?”

But Jesus didn’t. All he said was: “Peace be with you.”

They had a *moment* with Jesus. Like so many times before.

But Thomas wasn’t there.

And when they later told him what happened, he said that he needed to see that for himself.

We call him the “Doubting Thomas”, as if he is the ‘baddie’ in this story... How could he not believe what the others told him?

But maybe this was so important to him, that he just needed to make sure of the facts for himself. I can only imagine how left-out he must have felt.

Have you ever missed something, just to be told by others: “Oh, you must have been there! You must have seen that!” Longing with your whole heart that you could have been there and seen it?

Thomas was just a normal human being.

But Jesus knew this. So a week later the same thing happened, this time with Thomas present. Jesus was happy to fulfil Thomas’ commands.

Thomas wanted an experience with Jesus on his own terms, but when he saw Jesus, he found his terms to seem foolish. All Thomas needed, was that *moment* with Jesus.

And this brought him to confess that Jesus was his Lord and his God.

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I think that doubt can sometimes actually lead to deeper faith. Thomas wanted to *really know*, because it was important to him. It was important to **see** Jesus, so he could **understand**.

The Greek word used here for “see” has a richer meaning than only to physically see something, it means to “understand”. We use this word in this way often too, when we explain something to someone, and then to make sure they understand what we mean, we end our explanation with: “See? / See what I mean?”

All those years ago people might have frowned on the fact that Thomas doubted the testimony of the other disciples. Their testimony about seeing Jesus adhered to all the requirements of a true testimony in those days: if two or more people could testify to something, it was believed to be *the truth*.

But today we question everything. We doubt all the time. We are sceptical. Because we *have* to be!

There are so many people who try to deceive us, people phoning us or emailing us pretending to be someone they are not, trying to scam us out of our hard-earned money.

There are fake news and photoshop – things aren't always what they seem to be.

We live in a world where we have to make sure of the facts before we can believe anything.

No wonder some people find it hard to believe in God... But what these people who want scientific evidence for the existence of God fail to see, is that faith is bigger than all our worldly ways of understanding things.

There is no mathematical equation that can prove the existence of God. There is no scientific experiment that can prove the existence of God.

The certainty of the existence of God is to be found in a relationship. The relationship we have with Him, and consequently, the relationships we have with each other.

All you need to know, to see, that God is real, is a *moment* with him. Because once God has touched your life, nothing will ever be able to bring you to believe that He doesn't exist. Like Thomas could clearly testify.

Faith is not a series of beliefs, a list of boxes you need to tick. Faith is the process of getting to know God through Jesus, while guided by the Spirit.

Every time we read the Bible, we have a moment with God. Every time we come to church, share in Holy Communion or watch a baptism, we have a moment with God. Every time we pray we have a moment with God. Our encounters in nature, with others, and in quietness with ourselves, are all opportunities to have a moment with God.

And there is nothing more special in this life than sharing these *moments* with others.

Sitting there in a wee room, behind locked doors, the disciples shared a bond – they felt overwhelmed, but at least they were together.

After a whole year of living through a worldwide pandemic, we know what it means to feel *overwhelmed*, but also what it means to “be in it together”.

In our worries and uncertainty, God is with us. When we see him, *and* when we don't; when we *understand* life, and when we don't – He is always there.

And he says, to all of us: “Peace be with you.” With the peace of God in our hearts, we’ll be able to get through anything.

If a closed tomb couldn’t hold Jesus in, a closed church most certainly cannot keep him out. Hopefully ALL of us will be able to meet at church again EVERY Sunday soon (and not only a few of us every second Sunday), but in the meantime – let’s feel that bond we have as Christians – an *invisible* bond that binds us together, no matter whether we are 2 meters or 2000 years apart!

Jesus is alive! He is our Lord and our God. Even when we betray him, question him, or doubt him. Because he loves us, and will never judge us, no matter what!

Amen