

Easter 2 C St Stephen's 9.30 & 11 John 20: 19-31
3.4.16

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (v22)

“To: Jesus, son of Joseph, carpenter's shop, Nazareth.
From: Jordan Management Consultants, Jerusalem.

It is our opinion that the 12 men you have picked to manage your new organization lack the background, educational and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale.

We feel it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus, have racial leanings and both registered high on the manic-depressive scale.

One candidate, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, has a keen business mind and contacts in high places. He is highly motivated and ambitious. We recommend Judas as your controller and right-hand man.

We wish you every success in your new venture.”

As one reads the gospels, the disciples don't come out very well. They constantly misunderstood Jesus, and the accusations made about them above refer to events as the gospel story unfolds. And to cap it all, at the moment of Jesus' arrest they all run away. One can imagine their feelings they as sat in that upper room, perplexed and fearful, their hopes dashed with Jesus' crucifixion.

And then Jesus appears amongst them. I don't think they could believe it, or why did Jesus have to repeat his greeting "Peace be with you"? And he showed them his hands and his side, demonstrating that the resurrection was a reality through his words, his breath and his touch. This was no ghost, but a physical reality, but changed, not limited by walls and locks. Once the disciples accepted that it really was Jesus there was joy and a new sense of peace replacing their sense of abandonment and loss. It was then that Jesus commissioned them to go out and continue his work of making God's Kingdom known.

And just as God breathed on the dust to give life to Adam (Gen 2:7) and on the dry bones in the valley to give new life to the dead (Ez 37:9), so Jesus breathed on the disciples for new life as they receive the Holy Spirit of God, and are given his commission: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you". And it was for this reason that John wrote his gospel, as he says: "...these were 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." (v31)

The reading from Acts shows how the gospel is beginning to have an effect as Peter and his companions are brought before the Sanhedrin, the same court which condemned Jesus, and refusing to be silenced. Peter witnesses to the Council with a courage he failed to show at the High Priest's house on an earlier occasion. And in spite of persecutions and failures down the centuries, the Church is still here witnessing to God's love as seen in Jesus Christ.

For us, there has been no physical meeting with Jesus, no practical demonstration of the reality of the resurrection. We have had to take it on trust, relying on the witness of those we admire, and on our own experience as we seek to live the faith day by day.

We can therefore sympathise with Thomas who was not in the upper room on that first appearance of

Jesus to the disciples. Had he been sent out to get supplies? Or had he gone to mourn by himself? We know that Thomas was a cup half empty sort of person, ready to see the dark side of things. In John ch 11, Jesus says he is going back to Judea to visit the grave of Lazarus. The disciples remind him that on his last visit the Jews tried to kill him. Nevertheless, Jesus goes, and Thomas says: "Let us also go and die with him." (v16).

When he returns to the others, and they tell him excitedly what has happened, Thomas won't believe 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." (v 25) Jesus appears and invites Thomas to feel his wounds, saying: "Do not doubt, but believe". "My Lord and my God" says Thomas in reply. And then Jesus adds: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Many of us have honest doubts about aspects of our faith and we should not apologise or despair about this. Jesus didn't criticize Thomas for his doubts, and he won't criticize us. Remember that faith is not certainty – if it was, it would not be faith! But with what faith we have, we seek to be obedient to Christ.

So, we who believe, what should be our response to Jesus' instruction: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you"? I would suggest three things: Firstly, it is worship. All our Christian witness must start and end in worship, with which I include prayer. As St Paul reminds us, "For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes." (1 Cor 11: 26) We can't come into the Lord's presence without us being altered, and that should be reflected in our lives and get a response.

The second effect of Jesus' command should be to influence our, style of life, the way we live day by day. You must remember the story of how Desmond Tutu

determined to become a priest. As a small boy he was walking with his mother in Soweto, the native township in S. Africa. A white man raised his hat to his mother as they passed, and Tutu was so surprised he asked her who he was. She told him it was Trevor Huddleston, a priest. "I want to be a priest when I grow up" the boy said.

How we live says so much about our faith, whether it's skin deep, or reflected in everything we do. Those who are the most Christ-like will only ever be aware of their faults. One woman, whose help and support for those in trouble was legendary, attracted a stranger who wanted her help. The stranger was enquiring whether she was the woman with the great faith. "no", she replied. "I am the woman with the little faith in the great God." We have to be prepared to use our skills and abilities to further the gospel wherever we are - at work, at play, at home. Over the next few months there will be a series of articles in the magazine as to how we may do this.

Which leads on to the final way we are to respond, which is by our witness. If worship expresses our thanks to God for all his blessings, then witness is the expression of this in our lives, and is the point at which we get cold feet, or are struck dumb with embarrassment. Opportunities come day by day to say or do something which commends the gospel, if only we take them. This is why our prayer is so important, asking God to show what he wants us to do, as well the courage to do it.

Sophie was woman who scrubbed and had a lively faith. She was seen preaching outside a tobacco shop to a wooden advertising figure, and was made fun of. "Maybe I did; my eyesight is not so good. But talking to a wooden statue about Christ is not as bad as being a wooden Christian and never witnessing to anyone."

Finally, a man was cycling in Norfolk, and passing a cottage, felt he wanted to shout: "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," so he did. He had an impulse to do so a second time, so he did. Some months

later he had occasion to be in that village, so called on the cottage and asked whether the woman there was saved. "O yes, sir," she replied. "Some time ago I was I great distress and praying for help, I heard the words: "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world", and when I asked God to repeat them, he did so."