

Introduction:

I won't easily forget the stream of people who came forward to declare their participation in creating Palm fronds on Palm Sunday – thank you for that.

Nor will I forget the abject darkness at the end of our Maundy Thursday Service – thank you Claire and Jacquie.

I loved our Good Friday gathering when we were encouraged by Randal to consider our lives in the light of Psalm 126 – I'm still to do the hard work of thinking that through. Thank you Adrian and Jacquie

And when someone came to me after church on Easter Sunday morning and said they'd been thinking why we aren't singing '**hear the bells ringing**' – only to find that we then did – I was very encouraged – thank you Paul.

I found Easter this year starting with Palm Sunday one of the more memorable in my experience as it was for the people at another mud bath in Christchurch – some good things happened there – we'll hear about that soon.

And all this to the backdrop of ongoing discussions about shops opening through Easter; my question is why don't they go the whole way and abolish Easter weekend – it wouldn't bother us, we would still remember, we would still celebrate. I find the whole discussion around shops opening so superficial when you think about what Christian faith has contributed to this country's values, laws and so many more things. As Jesus said, 'there are none so blind that they cannot see.'

Reading: John 20:19-31

19 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!' 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

I wonder how it was for the disciples that day. Let's hear from one of them.

Mathew Hessian – monologue

But they weren't all captivated by this:

John 20:24-29

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

25 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.'

26 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!' 27 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.'

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

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

Talk:

Have several items that have a function, such as a torch, cell phone, stapler and a radio.

Display the items and ask the children how we know they are really there:

We can see them:

We can touch them: choose other children to come and hold the items and say how they feel.

We can watch them doing something: ask people to come and demonstrate each item's function.

It was a bit like this when Jesus appeared to his disciples.

Those who saw initially were overwhelmed with what they encountered – overjoyed the text says, I'm pretty sure we'd be the same.

I've always wondered why Thomas wasn't there; had he given up all hope; was the disappointment too much for him to cope with – it must have been his initial unbelieving response – unless I see, unless I touch, unless I'm convinced it's Jesus I won't believe. He wanted proof.

A week later, Thomas was back with the team. How was he feeling then? Had he processed what the others had experienced? None of this is mentioned but Jesus knew what he felt, Jesus knew how he was feeling – that's a comfort.

Thomas saw, he touched Jesus he noted that Jesus had come through a closed door and, as a result, he believed that Jesus was alive. Just like with our items Thomas, saw, touched and understood Jesus' function as God's son, his Saviour. The other disciples weren't imagining it. He really had been raised to life after dying on the cross!

Then Jesus has this encouragement for us:

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

At the beginning of the last book of the Bible there's a great statement which the disciples came to believe; which Thomas eventually came to believe.

'Jesus says...'

Revelation 1:18

I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Write a thank you prayer

Write something you now believe about Jesus

Write what you believe about Jesus being alive

Draw what makes you glad at Easter

Place it on the box representing the empty tomb

PRAYER

Father, Son and Spirit, thank you for creating a beautiful world

Father, thank you for sending Jesus

Jesus, thank you for choosing to die to save us

Spirit, thank you for coming to guide us into the truth

Father, thank you for raising Jesus to show us the reality of life after death

Jesus, thank you that you pray for us now

Spirit, thank you for coming to live in us as our comforter and helper

Amen.