

**Lord may your holy spirit lead and guide us this morning. Open our eyes and hearts to believe, see and receive you. In Jesus name. Amen**

Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrected Son of God, your Messiah, even though you didn't see him with your own eyes after he rose from the dead? If so, then Jesus says you are blessed!

John finishes his gospel story with a clear message about why he wrote it (although there is another chapter some believe was added later, where Jesus and Peter catch up over some fishing and forgiveness). John's story began with Jesus coming into the world, then he tells of Jesus' miracles and teachings, leading to the horror and sorrow of his death followed by a very happy ending with his resurrection...a great note to finish on but you want the story to go on. Well, the good news with the gospel is it doesn't end there...in some ways it is just the beginning – the beginning of the Church – and of our role to continue the story.

The message at the end of John's gospel is about believing. Believe and see. Believe and receive. Believe and be sent.

**Believe and see.** You might think I have that the wrong way around – see and believe makes better sense and yes once the disciples see they believe, but I am adding a twist. It seems the disciples did have some trouble believing until they saw Jesus for themselves...not even believing the women who *had* seen Jesus and been sent to tell the disciples. In fact in Luke read that they thought the women were talking 'nonsense'! In John's gospel we read that John and Peter had run and seen an empty tomb, but it seems they didn't quite believe that Jesus was alive. In today's passage we find the disciples behind locked doors huddled together in fear. Jesus had told the women not to be afraid, but the disciples are still trembling...

Jesus then appears and shows them his hands and his side – and then they believe and rejoice! The disciple Thomas wasn't there that day, and it seems he didn't believe until he saw Jesus sides and hands for himself. Jesus knew that's what Thomas needed to believe and so when he appears again a week later, he straight away shows Thomas what he wanted to see. You see Jesus wanted the disciples to be assured that he was risen.

These men and women become eyewitnesses to the resurrection. It is important that they saw him. The resurrection and all the miracles that John put in his gospel were so that we would come to believe even though we couldn't see firsthand. It seems John knew this book would be read by many later.

Thomas is often given a bad rap here – known as doubting Thomas and we question why he didn't believe the others. But then as I pointed out – it seems they hadn't really believed the women either. Think about it yourself – we like to see the facts for ourselves don't we. Anyway – Thomas is quite remarkable because he *believes and sees*.

He sees who Jesus really is. Others had declared Jesus to be the Messiah, but Thomas declares him to be God himself. He proclaims, 'My Lord and my God!' This term Lord was the same one given to Yahweh throughout the Old Testament. The name of the creator and covenant partner of Israel.

With this proclamation John is wrapping up his gospel very nicely – tying it back to the beginning. What did he say back in chapter 1?

*In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made...The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...No-one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*

Thomas believed and saw who Jesus was – the creator of the world, he was God himself. Jesus made God known to us.

Do we believe and see? We may say we believe, but do we see Jesus and recognize and acknowledge him as our Lord and God? //

Where should we expect to see him, you might ask? It may be simple but it's worth remembering that we see Jesus in the bible. God is revealed in the scriptures, and it's through reading, studying, and discussing the bible that we can see Christ. That is what John intended when he wrote his gospel. Verse 31 "These (signs) are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God" and as Thomas points out to believe that Jesus is God himself.

How else can we see Jesus? In his Church, in the community that gather to worship and read his word. The community that loves one another, that care and pray for one another. His body, the Church. Do we see Jesus there? Do we see Jesus here? If we believe and have him living in us – then we should see him in one another...a good segue to my next point...Jesus in us.

**Believe and receive. Be filled by him and have life.**

When Jesus appeared to the disciples the first thing he said was 'peace be with you'. He knew they were afraid, and he brings them peace immediately. Shalom is the Hebrew word...a rich blessing, meaning more than what we understand as 'peace'.

Hebrew words go beyond their spoken pronunciation. Each Hebrew word conveys feeling, intent and emotion. *Shalom* is more than just simply peace; it is a complete peace.

**According to Strong's Concordance** *Shalom* means completeness, wholeness, health, peace, wellbeing, safety, soundness, tranquillity, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, the absence of agitation or discord.

Jesus's 'shalom' on that Easter evening to his disciples is like the complement to his 'it is finished' on the cross; for we now have the peace of reconciliation with God.

He then breathes on them and says, 'receive the holy spirit'. Jesus gives them new life as it were. The creator of the world, who breathed life into humankind in the beginning now breathes on them to make them new creations in him. Back to John 1...

*In the beginning was the word...Through him all things were made...In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*

Jesus is life and he came to give us abundant life. Now have another look at verse 31 in chapter 20...John wrote his gospel *so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah...and that through believing you may have **life** in his name.*

We, like the disciples can be filled with the life of Christ through believing in him. We can have abundant life in him now and for eternity.

In Peter's first letter he writes to the followers of Jesus who have been exiled for their faith and face persecution. He reminds them of their *new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* (1 Peter 1:3) Liam and James were baptised into new life last Sunday.

These followers of Jesus believed even though they had not seen Jesus during his resurrected time on earth. Peter writes,

*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy.* (1 Peter 1:8)

I pray that is true for all of you also. That you believe and see Jesus, our Messiah, and are filled with hope and glorious, inexpressible, joy and peace.

Jesus blessed the disciples with complete peace, breathed on them and said receive the Holy Spirit. It wasn't just so they could keep that peace to themselves...no, he said *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*

This brings me to my third point...

**Believe and be sent.**

Once we believe and see Jesus for who he is, we receive his peace, his breath of new life with the Holy Spirit, we are to go into the world and do what Jesus had been doing. This is where we start taking our place in the story.

We can't do it on our own...we need Jesus' life within us to strengthen and guide us and give us courage and power to proclaim his word. We see how this new life worked in the disciples...go and have a read of Acts. The disciple Peter, a fisherman, the one who always seemed to be putting his foot in it and saying the wrong thing, the one who denied even knowing Jesus...gets up on the day of Pentecost, (having received the Holy Spirit), with courage, power and conviction and addresses the crowd proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter certainly was a new creation!

He becomes a leader, a pastor and teacher, writing to the exiled Christians to encourage them, and to encourage us.

Our challenge today is to proclaim the same message and to be Christ's courageous witnesses.

Jesus' commission to the disciples gives us clear instructions as to how we are sent. Look at verse 21 in John, he says as the *Father sent me*, so I send you. Jesus was sent with the Father's authority...we are sent likewise. We have his authority. Being sent by God, Jesus only acted according to God's will. If you look back over John's gospel you will read again and again that Jesus said he was doing the will of the one who sent him. We too are to act according to the will of God...following Jesus' teaching...preaching the Kingdom of God, loving, healing, and forgiving. He speaks in this passage of the forgiving and retaining of sins.

We might get a bit concerned about the idea of retaining sins or withholding forgiveness...surely only God will do that. I don't think John is saying that the disciples will have some special power to decide whose sins will be forgiven, but rather he highlights the seriousness of our mission to be sent, to make known the love of God and his forgiveness as people believe in Jesus. It is our job to proclaim the gospel – some will hear the message and come to repentance and receive forgiveness and life and some will choose not to respond and hence 'remain in their sin'.

As we believe and are sent, we need to be aware that it is a costly mission we are on. Jesus suffered, even unto death. We know that for Christians in some parts of the world to proclaim Christ as Lord and Saviour may cost them greatly. We may face ridicule or derision, others face death. We may get turned down as we invite someone to come to church but let's have courage to invite and pray that God will do the rest. It is not going to kill you if you are rejected, but it might just be the beginning of new life for someone.

We must remember that Jesus gives us *all* that we need to do his mission. He fills us with the power of the Holy Spirit, and he is with us, remember the words of the Great Commission at the end of Matthew...He sends the disciples with his authority to; *Go in to all the world making disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

So, as we come to the end of John's gospel story, I want you to remember that it is not the end of *the* story. John wrote his gospel for a reason – he wanted his readers to believe in Jesus, to receive new life in him and his amazing Shalom; and Jesus wanted us to continue the story...to pass it on. To be his church, his witnesses. To tell others about him that they too may believe and have life. Have hope in this broken world.

It is the most amazing story ever written...and the most read book. I pray you will...

Believe and see, believe, and receive, believe, and be sent.

Believe and be blessed!

In the name of the Father, who sent the Son who sent the Holy Spirit. Amen.