**Easter Sunday Evensong Sermon on 20th April 2025**

**All Saints with Holy Trinity, Loughborough. Preacher: Penny Pullan**

**Readings:** Isaiah 43.1-21, **John 20.19-23**

***19****When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’****20****After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.****21****Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’****22****When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.****23****If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’*

Hallelujah! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed, Alleluia!**

Fear is paralysing. It drains away our energy, closes down our options and limits our thinking. It sends our nervous systems into fight or flight, or even perhaps freeze. We don’t know what to do. We can’t see a way out. The future seems bleak.

There seems to be a lot of uncertainty and fear around in our world these days. The US President has, according to the BBC, ‘blown up the world order’. Putin, even in a so-called, temporary ceasefire, orders bombing of civilians in Ukraine. The news from Gaza continues to be horrific, and other conflicts rumble on elsewhere. Closer to home, our trans siblings are worried about the recent Supreme court statement, and abuse of trans people is rising.

Fear is tangible in our time.

If we travel back in time to the first Easter Day to Jerusalem, fear is tangible there too, and for good reason. Jerusalem is a city under foreign occupation and ruled over by Herod and Pontius Pilate. Three days before, a man that Pilate himself declared innocent of every charge, had been put to death, a brutal, horrific and slow death, crucified to satisfy the hate of the priests and the angry cries of the crowd. In all of this horror, at this time, many of Jesus’ followers had abandoned him because of fear.

So, imagine the scene in that room in Jerusalem. The trauma of everything that had happened that week is fresh in their minds, feeding their fear. Disciples, women and men, are keeping close to each other, with the door locked in case people come to get them and kill them too, because they were known to be followers of Jesus. That fear is palpable. It’s pressing in.

There is one anomaly, a bright spark in this darkness, a story shared by Mary Magdalene earlier in the day. She says that she has met Jesus, who is risen. (But she’s only a woman, not considered a reliable witness at that time, so they wait together, in a locked room, fearful and uncertain.)

Then, the most extraordinary and unexpected thing happens.

Jesus is there. In the room. Despite the locked doors…

And what does he do? Does he give them a detailed breakdown of everything that had happened and why? No, not this time. Instead, what he says is: **Peace be with you**. It’s so important that he says this twice over.

A couple of things about that phrase: ‘Peace be with you’. The *you* here, as it so often is in the New Testament, is plural, so he’s addressing them as a group, a community, and I suppose too, he is addressing us.

The peace that Jesus talks about is not just absence of war, or absence of fear. He’s talking of *Shalom*, the peace which passes all understanding, which drives out fear and, in its place, brings wellbeing of body, mind and soul, for each person *and* for their community *and* the place where they live, for all those who turn to him.

Note that this peace doesn’t diminish and forget about suffering. The risen Christ still has holes in his hands, feet and side: he is our disabled God. Our God isn’t a God who forgets about suffering. Ours is a God who acknowledges suffering and *transforms* it through Jesus’ resurrection.

Going back to the room, after sharing peace with the disciples, Jesus breathes on them, echoing the gift of life to the very first human being, at the start of the Hebrew scriptures in Genesis. This time, though, it’s a re-creationof a new humanity: God’s people in God’s Kingdom. These are people, no longer defined by fear, but instead activated and energised by the life-giving Spirit of God.

This is how God works. He doesn’t stay far away, but comes through the doors we have locked in fear, whether physical or metaphorical. His Peace isn’t just calming, it changes people. And his Spirit animates us to live for the Risen Christ and for others.

That doesn’t mean that life will be easy when we turn to God. It doesn’t mean that our lives will be safe. It doesn’t mean that our lives will be prosperous. But, whatever we are going through, God offers peace. We can be part of God’s community and we know that the victory has already been won. But there is still work to do here.

It won’t be easy. We can think of Christians who have stood up to evil and paid the price: Bonhoeffer, Navalny and many more. But we are offered Peace (Shalom) and we are offered the Spirit and we will have each other and all those who have passed into the cloud of witnesses throughout the ages.

Through the storms of life, we can hold onto the prophecy of Isaiah, now fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

*Do not fear for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name: you are mine. (Isaiah 43.1b)*

Hallelujah! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed, Alleluia!**

Amen