

2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER

07/04/13 – 8.am

TEXT:- “You Love Him, although you have not seen Him, and you believe in Him, although you do not now see Him.” **1. PETER Ch. 1 v 8**

Quite often, when I am preparing a talk like this, I find that I have to re-assess what I believe, or what my faith actually means to me. This is particularly so with certain themes such as suffering, prayer and its relevance in today’s society and times! I mention this because one of the things I found hard in becoming an Anglican, was that how many Christians seem to think that certain experiences were sin! Experiences that I had been taught were in fact NOT sin, but occasions when Satan was testing MY faith! The two most common were TEMPTATION, which even our Lord went through in the wilderness! Where the Sin actually comes in is if we give way to temptation. Another is doubt, something which all Christians have from time to time! Even the Apostles had doubts, Listen to St. Paul in **2 Timothy Ch. 1 v 16** –“You know that everyone in the province of Asia, have deserted me, may the Lord have mercy on Onesiphorous because he cheered me up, and was not ashamed that I am in prison, as soon as he arrived in Rome he started looking for me until he found me. Certainly, as we can see from our Gospel this morning Thomas had doubts – serious doubts – that need proof to dispel. And Jesus reply – “How happy are those who believe WITHOUT seeing me! **St. John Ch. 20 v 29**

As I said I often have doubts, and it is then that I find myself looking again at my faith, at my understanding of God, of Jesus and His act of Salvation & Redemption, and of my relationship with God and Jesus together with the Holy Spirit. Doubt which often comes when we are low in Spirit, due to illness, stress, or some form of suffering. Exactly the situation with the Church of Asia Minor, which the Letter from St. Peter is addressing, it is encouragement to Christians suffering persecution and doubt for their Faith. St. Peter reminds them that through Jesus God has given them a new life and a living hope of His rich blessings. This new life and living hope DOES bring great joy and peace which DOES in fact overcome the trials and tribulations of this earthly life. He tells them (AND US) that these troubles are to be considered a test of the genuine nature of their (AND OUR) faith & belief in the UNSEEN Risen Lord Jesus! **“You love Him, although you have not seen Him, and you believe in Him, although you do not now see HIM. SO, you rejoice with a great and glorious joy” ! Peter 1 v 8** . He almost paraphrases Jesus’ own words to Thomas in the Upper Room; **“Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me.” St. John Ch. 20 v 29**

So, these weeks of the Easter Season are another time for us to look afresh at our beliefs, and like the Apostles & Disciples as they meet with our Risen Lord Jesus, face up to any doubts WE may have in our Faith! It is a fact, that as Thomas thought, the empty tomb cannot prove the existence of our Risen Lord Jesus; it is our own experience of His Risen presence with us, within us, and around us that in fact does! Easter IS the time when ALL Christians have to face up to the reality of our faith, we cannot avoid doing so – the Resurrection DID happen, God did have the power of death that He professed, Jesus proved that with His raising of Lazarus, the son of the widow of Nain, and the rising of many of God’s people from their graves at the Crucifixion **St. Matthew Ch. 27 v 52**. We have to trust in our own experience of the Risen Jesus, unlike the Disciples who saw for themselves & St. Thomas who demanded proof before he believed. However, we like all those early martyrs and Christians have not, It is our faith, our trust, our hope and our own personal experience of Jesus in our lives that confirms it. As that great Hymn Writer A.H. Ackley states:-

**He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today,
He walks with me, He talks with me,
Along life’s narrow way, He lives, He lives,
Salvation to impart, you ask me how I know He lives,
He lives with in my heart**

The Apostles in their letters of encouragement weren’t just written for those early suffering Christians but to us also! Their message is just as relevant to day in the 21st Century, especially to our Sisters & Brothers in Christ who are suffering persecution for their Faith, and also to us! We DO have a Living Lord whose love & strength gives US a new life and a living hope of God’s Rich Blessings for ALL His people.

“You love Him, although you have not seen Him, and you believe in Him, so you rejoice with a gret and glorious joy.”! Peter Ch. 1 v 7

John Smelt