

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter – 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

*Jane Quarmby, Reader*

“We’ll meet again, don’t know where, don’t know when, but I know we’ll meet again some sunny day.”

Vera Lynn made this song famous over 70 years ago, during the dark days of the Second World War, when the world was a frightening place, people were dying before their time, rationing and restrictions were in place, people were losing loved ones without being able to say goodbye, or travel to be with them. Governments were focused on just getting by, as were ordinary people too. Rumours swirled around, and it wasn’t easy to sort out what was true and what was false. Food was hard to come by and families were torn apart.

No one knew when their time might come – a bomb could fall from the sky, or soldiers come and kill you. There were many acts of heroism, of kindness, and a sense of common purpose. Most people just wanted to get through it, to a better place, to sunshine and laughter and love. Vera Lynn’s song of hope, of meeting loved ones again, is suddenly very popular again – Radio Northampton is putting together a virtual choir to sing it. A friend recently e mailed me, stuck in South Africa on a much extended holiday, and finished with the words “we’ll meet again, don’t know where, don’t know when.”

The world is fighting another war now, a different war, against an unseen, indiscriminate enemy against which there are few defences other than to stay at home, have no contact with others face to face, and pray that neither we nor our loved ones are struck down by this modern day plague. The heroes in this war are the medical staff risking their own lives to care for the sick and the dying. It’s a stark reminder to the human race that in the face of a tiny unseen virus, we are powerless and it is left to God’s mercy whether we make it or not.

If you watch the constant stream of updates on the news, it’s easy to feel that the world will never be the same again. Something frightening, uncontrolled, not

understood, is in the world which has suddenly become a dangerous place outside our own front doors. The majority of us are, literally, hiding behind closed doors. It's easy to get depressed, anxious and scared.

Just like the disciples of Jesus, over 2000 years ago, living in fear of what will happen to them if they show their faces outside because they followed a man called Jesus Christ. They'd only been with him a few years but in that time they had seen him do amazing, miraculous things, healed the sick, brought the dead back to life, taught them how to live. But he had upset the religious leaders and they had had their revenge – Jesus had been arrested, tortured and killed. And now those same religious leaders would be after the disciples. Small wonder they met behind locked doors.

But like spring following winter, new stirrings of hope, a glimpse of something new and even more amazing had come to most of the disciples. Mary had told them she had seen Jesus, that he had done as he'd told them he would do, he'd risen from the dead and she's seen him, talked to him. And then suddenly Jesus had appeared to most of his disciples, in a way they couldn't explain. He'd arrived in the middle of them, despite the closed doors, spoken to them and shown them the wounds in his hands, feet and side. They were beside themselves with joy.

All except the one who wasn't there. Thomas missed it. When he was told all about it, he wasn't having any of it, not unless he saw Jesus for himself and touched him. His name has gone down in history – Doubting Thomas. For Thomas didn't accept what other people told him, not without real evidence. Whilst the White Queen in Alice in Wonderland could "believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast", Thomas couldn't, not even when all his colleagues assured him they'd seen Jesus and that he was as real as they were – and as alive as they were. It wasn't in Thomas's nature. He was the one who had asked the questions others perhaps wanted to but did not dare – and he was the one who needed proof. I wonder how the other disciples reacted to that flat refusal to accept what they were saying? It is worth remembering that when Mary, the first one to see the risen Christ, dashed back to tell the disciples all about it, they didn't believe her. So it wasn't just Thomas who found it hard to believe until they actually saw Jesus for themselves.

But, a week later, Thomas is with the others when Jesus appears again, and reaches out to Thomas with those pierced hands – and Thomas realizes he was wrong. Jesus was alive, just as the others had said. Better late than never. Instantly Thomas goes from disbelief to a belief so strong that he makes one of the most

powerful statements of Jesus's deity in the New Testament which sums up John's entire gospel – "My Lord and my God!". The world had changed, and all our lives with it. Thomas was lucky, he saw the risen Christ and believed wholeheartedly in him. Jesus knew his Thomas, and also knew that there would be millions of people who wouldn't see him as those early disciples did, but would still believe their words and their testimony.

When challenged about our faith, it is sometimes hard to explain how come we believe in a man made God, who came to save the world in three short years of ministry, who rose from the dead. It is not something we can understand or touch. We have no concrete proof now other than the testimony of others. But that testimony is powerful – as Peter puts it in our reading from Acts: "God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this".

Tradition has it that Thomas went on to be a missionary to the East, to Persia and India, and died in India. He may be famous for his doubts, but Jesus welcomed his doubt, and knew that we all have our doubts from time to time. Only by confronting those doubts and working through them can we come to a richer and deeper faith. Jesus said: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed." He invites us all to investigate the truth of the resurrection, and explore Jesus as the way, the truth and the life.

In these troubled times, when we need our faith to be strong, we pray:

Lord, we do not always believe as we should. We try our hardest but our faith is weak and we lose sight of all you have promised and all you are able to do. There is so much in life which is a mystery, and there are so many things which seem to deny everything we believe about you. Despite our good intentions, doubt sometimes gets the upper hand so that we begin to question even the things most precious to us. Yet though we are faithless to you, always you are faithful to us, refusing to let go. Come to us now we pray, so that we may confess you again as our Lord and our God, in this time of worship and in the days ahead.

And, in the words of that old song:

"We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when  
But I know we'll meet again some sunny day  
Keep smiling through  
Just like you always do  
'til the blue skies drive the dark clouds far away."