**Reflection for the 2nd Sunday of Easter 2021**

**John 20: 19 - end**

Are humans like sheep? Or are sheep like humans? There are times when we do display similar characteristics. A flock of sheep faced with a fierce predator will scatter - later when the predator has departed, they may be found huddled together in a corner. The disciples scatter when the guards come to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Later the disciples come back together, and here we find them in this upper room with the doors locked, filled with the tangled emotions of fear and grief. Will there be a knock on the door? Will they come to arrest them to carry them away for torture and death? They feel the loss, terribly, of their beloved teacher and mentor. The grief is compounded by the events that followed the crucifixion. Jesus has risen: He is not there. He told then what would happen, but did they understand - could they understand and what do they make of it all now. Their heads befuddled with grief and fear they huddle together in a locked room shut away from the world.

And all at once Jesus is there with them - there standing in the midst of them. ”Peace be with you” he says. Jesus shows them his hands and his side. In this action he shows that he is real. They can see the wounds, which obviously no longer trouble him. Nevertheless, it proves that he is real - it proves that he has risen that he is there with them as he always said he would be - as he always is - then and now.

The great Commission: “As the Father sends me so send I you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any they are retained.”

The eleven receive their commission, they are now to carry on the work of Jesus, to go out into the world, to witness to the world, the unending love of Jesus, for the whole world, for everyone. We too are inheritors of this great commission we too must witness to the love of God in our daily lives. This sending out is no accident; the disciples are sent out. As we look towards the future this ‘sending out’ should remind us that we too are sent out into the world, that we need to be looking outwards not looking in. We must look towards the needs of others not simply as to what suits us.

Thomas is not there and is rather sceptical when he hears what the other disciples have to tell him. “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side I will not believe”.

Poor Thomas! He is stuck with the name of Doubting Thomas and yet all of us doubt from time to time; some things are easier to accept than others. We should not be surprised that Thomas finds it hard to believe that Jesus was there, but Thomas gets his reward the following week he himself comes face to face with the risen Lord.

“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those have not seen and yet have come to believe” says Jesus.

Faith calls us to believe things that we have not seen, things that we have not experienced. We have been spared the trauma of those dark days but recently we have had our own dark days. The last year has shown us something that we never thought we would have to experience. The reality of the pandemic has touched all of our society, our way of life. We too have been shut away and now the prospect of things opening up gives us new enthusiasm new hope and new beginnings and this is very much a part of our Easter message: New Life New Hope.

**Christ is Risen He is risen indeed Alleluia!**

*Loving God, you give us hope in all its fullness;*

*In our faith in the future,*

*in our cherishing of the present,*

*In the lessons from the past.*

*Let your love shine through that hope.*

*Give us the purpose and peace*

*To entrust you with our lives, our fears,*

*our loves, our losses,*

*So that our spirits are lifted*

*As we praise your name;*

*And our commitment redoubled*

*To spread your name far and wide,*

*knowing that you will equip us for our journey,*

*with the help of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

***Amen***