

## **St Stephen's Church**

**Easter 1, 8 April 2018. (1, John 1, 1-2, 2; John 20, 19-end)**

### **Revd John McGrath**

On the evening of the first Easter day, Jesus suddenly appears to the disciples. He comes into a locked room filled with fear and says, "Peace be with you," then shows his hands and his sides. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Today I emphasise that our faith is important in bringing joy to others. Jesus changes situations and changes people. He comes into a fear filled room and the room is then filled with peace and with joy. Jesus was sent by God our Father into a fallen world and he changed the world. He sent his first disciples to continue his work of changing the world. Our diocesan vision speaks of healthy churches transforming communities. That vision is really about the church changing situations and changing people.

Jesus repeated the words, "peace be with you." He told the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you". Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit". He gave his disciples a job to do which was only possible in the power of the Holy Spirit. This church has that same job as the first disciples, of changing the world. However, we cannot do this in our strength but in the strength that God supplies through the Holy Spirit. Jesus commanded the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit. That is something we must do. The Holy Spirit will not be forced upon us. We have to ask for and receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises that if we ask, we will, without doubt, receive what we ask for.

Do you want to change our community? Do you want to change the world? In that case, know that you need God's help. Even Jesus, although by nature God, could not do what the Father sent him to do without the power of the Holy Spirit. It was at his baptism that he received the anointing power of the Holy Spirit to fulfil his mission. We have a mission. We need the anointing power of the Holy Spirit to fulfil the mission that Jesus gives to us. Our mission is to change the world, by changing people. People will be changed by hearing the message of the gospel. Or, will they?

Thomas was not there on the first evening. The others told him what had happened but he would not believe them. He wanted more than their testimony. He wanted proof on his own terms. He said, "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." So Thomas' faith did not come simply by hearing the testimony of his friends. How frustrating it must have been for the others that Thomas did not believe them? I have often been frustrated when sharing my faith with others, and they have not believed. But it is not my job or any Christian's job to convince people. We are only called to be witnesses for Christ. It is not a loving action to try to manipulate other people into believing. Rather, we must trust in the Lord to bring people to faith as we witness to them.

A week later Jesus appears again and tells Thomas to do what Thomas said he needed to in order to believe. But Thomas did not touch the nail or spear marks in the Lord's body. For Thomas, seeing was believing. Yet, he went beyond belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Thomas made a declaration of Faith, worship and commitment. He said, "My Lord, and my God." Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe'. That applies to us. In our Creeds, we say, like Thomas, that Jesus is our Lord, and our God. But do we have the same commitment to the Lord which Thomas had? Thomas the doubter became Thomas the shouter. Thomas shared his faith with others and admitted his own hesitation in believing. We may have been hesitant in obeying our Lord's command. In verse 3 of the Epistle from John we read, "we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete." In this church, our joy will only be complete if we see others coming into fellowship with us and with God. That will not happen unless the words of the Lord to those first disciples are accepted as being for us too. As the Father has sent me, so I sent you. Will you accept that mission? If so, then obey our Lord's other command, "Receive the Holy Spirit.' Remember that you will receive what you ask for. So, ask! Amen.