

Sermon for Easter 2 2020

Blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed. John 20:29

On one hand, most of the time, people in the twenty first century take on trust a lot of things without seeing for themselves. They rely on witnesses to tell them it is so: teachers, scientists, professors, authors, reporters, and even those anchor-persons of popular opinion programmes.

We have also reached the stage where some will believe something that is disseminated on the internet, or any juicy conspiracy theory.

On the other hand, when it comes to religious faith, and to something like trust in a living Christ, this is rejected as blind irrational faith.

The early Christians of that first century, and many generations after them, treasured this story of faith, the story of Thomas. They enjoyed hearing how Thomas would not believe Jesus was alive until he saw Jesus for himself.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

That was them - and us.

They had listened to witnesses, to personal testimony, and as they listened the brilliant truth which exceeded all explanation took hold of their hearts and they believed. The witness of other believers was corroborated by the witness of God's Holy Spirit within them.

Such people who had never seen Jesus, delighted in the story of Thomas because it touched their own story; especially those particular words of Jesus:

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

We can still identify wherever it is read in church today.

Faith comes, not at the end of a long, logical argument, but in a moment of revelation; usually in response to the witness of other believers in the living Christ.

So there is nothing essentially irrational about saying: "Christ is risen!" For the witnesses, it was most unexpected, it was dramatic, it was unique. It overwhelmed those first believers with tear and awe.

The resurrection is something at the very horizon of human experience.

The resurrection seems foolish to those who have decided that such a thing could never happen. The thing is though, everyone lives by one type of faith or another.

It is interesting, then, that there are scholars and scientists who are believers. For example physicist John Wheeler who invented the term Black Hole and biologist and ecologist Charles Birch among many.

From the very beginning there was a stream of witnesses who demonstrated their faith by a life and a death commitment to it. It was no mere theory.

As a result of their faith in Christ and his resurrection those first witnesses, the christian faith spread all over the Roman world and beyond. In fact Thomas was one who went beyond, traditionally he was thought of as going to India, where there are still christians who call themselves St Thomas Christians.

Most of those first witnesses paid with their lives. The word martyr means witness. They were witnesses to a living Christ.

From this source came the generations of more witnesses who though they had not seen Jesus, yet believed and experienced the impact of his living Person on their lives.

Think of Augustine, Athanasius, Basil, The Cyrils, Irenaeus, Aquinas, Luther Calvin, Barth or Kung, just to name a few, and you will find brilliant intellects working through their resurrection Gospel.

These are just a handful from among the great host of the witnesses. They have not seen yet they certainly believed with a trust and commitment that took them to a most profound expression of the Spirit of Christ in their age and their place. There is nothing irrational or irrelevant about such a faith.

So don't be discouraged by the criticisms of those who, on a premise taken with supposed scientific faith, claim that the spiritual world does not exist.

Dare to confess the faith thankfully, living the questions you have.

Dare to celebrate the risen Christ, in this Easter season, and in this season of crisis dare to believe in a future beyond the lockdown, when we can meet and celebrate the resurrection of Christ week by week.

Blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed.

The Lord be with you