

PEACE BE WITH YOU

One of the most important words Jesus speaks to his disciples, before and after his resurrection is 'peace'. We hear about him saying 'peace I leave with you...do not let your hearts be troubled' and here he says 'peace be with you' three times, as if to emphasise the point. We certainly need peace.

Peace, though, is often thought of in terms of what it *isn't!* So we think about peace as being a quiet place – no noise, no conflict, no people, no disturbance. But peace is needed most when there *is* disturbance, and when there is noise or conflict and certainly when there are people.

So look at what Jesus connects with peace: he doesn't say '*peace I give you and now go and take a long rest on your own*' He says '*peace be with you....I am sending you....receive the holy Spirit, if you forgive sins, they are forgiven.*'

Jesus sends them out into the world, not away from it and the first thing he talks about is forgiveness of sins. When there are people there is conflict; when there is conflict, there's a need of forgiveness. Forgiveness doesn't come easily so you need the Spirit of Christ in you to manage it.

And then Thomas comes into the picture. It seems as if he *has* been trying to get away on his own. In his own disturbance he needs to know there can be peace. He's not actually on his own and it will do him good to realise. *Peace be with you.*

I think of someone I know who faced huge conflict with family. He vowed not to talk to his brother again because of the hurt caused-and he didn't and years later the brother died. He also decided to push the other hurts on one side and try to 'get over it and move on'. Yet every so often the anger he felt couldn't be contained and he would erupt at other people because things had never been resolved. It made him personally feel unwanted, and in his efforts to pretend everything was alright, his family didn't see they had done anything wrong or take responsibility for their actions. The man's instincts would then be to get away from the problem because he feared facing the issues.

A whole host of problems because those people did not try to create peace. It takes effort, sacrifice and courage. It's what Jesus died for, and he knew it would be difficult but he reassures disciples that they can know his peace and his presence as they go on. And that when they feel unconvinced, they can remember that Jesus shows the scars- he took part in the conflict too.

So we pray for ourselves – for the Holy Spirit who will help us face the disturbances of life; for our courage to make peace and bring forgiveness; for our comfort in knowing the Jesus of the scars; for our world to find people of peace with the character to change things even when they seem most difficult.