1. ﻿“Well, since it's the second Sunday of Easter, I can't help but say, Alleluia, Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

2. 3. 4. John 20:1-31
*On the evening of that day, that first day of the week, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. After he said this, he showed them his hands and side.

The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

“And with that, he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

Now Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the 12, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord. But he said to them, unless I see the nails marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here.”

“A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here.

See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.

Thomas said to him, My Lord and my God. Then Jesus told him, Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.”*

*“Jesus performed many other signs in their presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name. The Gospel of the Lord.*

Thanks be to God.

5. Last week, we read from Luke's account, his early account of the women coming to the tomb. And it ends with Peter getting up, running, and going to the tomb and checking it out.

And it says that he marvelled. There was some awe that he experienced. But it was still rumours, in a sense, there was a real absence. No body…..He just saw some, bands of death that were no longer wrapped around Jesus.”

But they had the report of the women. I wonder what the disciples might have been doing if they had believed Mary?

But this kind of fear is a reality for many believers around the world.

In Australia, we the church have been somewhat marginalised. We can advertise our services, we can promote and plan and few join us. Few believe.

At one time the church was at the centre. Literally, at the centre of town and the social centre of activities and fellowship. But gradually the church has moved to the edge of town and socially and culturally marginalised. We are no longer at the centre. Just a part of the myriad of voices.

For many people that is a fearful reality. They want the glory days of old where the church is the most important institution in society.

But it’s not. That’s OK the earliest church, these disciples were very much at the margins of society too hiding behind the 4 walls.

Interestingly Gen Z, in various world studies the most Spiritual generation of recent times. Much more so that Gen X or Baby Boomers. But they remain deeply suspicious of organised religion….the religious authorities. They fear the abuse and control and of organised religion is real and possibly keeping many from finding Christ.

6. In some parts of the world churches have to hide. The authorities may even be hunting them. Persecution of Christians is very real in some parts of our world. But people are recognising their need and the church is growing in many of those places to.

7. The disciples are sitting in hiding. Their hero has been killed and they are scared they will be next. They are still feeling his absence when…

8. it's a real presence. I mean, there is just the actual presence of Jesus in his disciples' life and right there with them in the room.

On Holy or Maundy Thursday Jesus washes the disciples feet. A very physical thing. A serving thing. Awkwardly intimate.

Those same feet betray him just hours later.

“He goes ahead of that and washes them anyway even though he knows they will betray him. It's like he is like bodily giving them what he is, ahead of time. And now Jesus appears amongst them.

We have to be careful here because tradition says he walked through the walls. But we are not actually told how Jesus gets into the locked room. Just that he appears before them.

But we do know that this is significant. Remember if it is weird it is probably important.

Now the disciples have a chance to walk in to a new life, a new resurrection land. And the gospel writers emphasis different parts to this. Luke emphasises wonder and awe, John believing. There is something about this resurrection land that is more real, a reality we deeply long for.

9. I mean, when I think about what I want in the resurrection community and how important that resurrection community is, which is the church, I can't think of a better list than what we see here. I want the presence of Jesus. I want the peace that he brings.

I want healed wounds. I want joy and gladness when we recognize his presence. I want a mission, and to be wrapped up into that mission that isn't us out doing something for Jesus, but as the Father sent me, so I'm sending you.

And the life of the Spirit. And then just the commission that we actually have a word of absolution. To receive and a word of absolution to give.”

“Our Father has forgiven, here we live in that amazing forgiveness.

On Easter Sunday we have a great celebration. He is risen! He is risen indeed. And yet, the Sunday after can feel just like these disciples locked up in fear.”

10. That life somehow kind of grabs us back and almost immediately wants to redefine who we are and what we are connected to and who we are. It feels so human to me, and the seeming failure of it feels grace filled. In my own life I don’t always feel like life is ever victorious. Sometimes I am afraid. I don't always see the resurrected life, I see locked up fear, I resonate with this.

11. The’ disciples could be forgiven for wondering if Jesus, if God had abandoned them. Jesus probably wasn’t the only one praying “My God, my God why have you abandoned me?”

Have you ever wondered in your life, or your church if God had abandoned you? What about us?

12. And then we have this breaking in of the resurrected Lord in the midst of all that.

For the disciples stories of the risen Jesus must have felt like hope and fear. Hope that it’s true but not daring to believe because what if it is not true. That disappointment might be too much to bear. The fear is real.

Fear and doubt.

Then He pronounces peace and even the word of absolution, the word of forgiveness, I think those disciples must have been wondering, how is He?, we know how He was, but how is He?, Even after our failure to stick with Him, through all the events of His trial and the cross and the garden, and one human failure after another, we wonder, is He done with us?

13. This is one of the great lies isn’t it. I said this a few weeks ago. Sin doesn’t change how God relates to us but it does change how we think God will relate to us.

14. Is God done with His church? And the answer is NO! While the church in the West has been marginalised the church across the world continues to grow. God continues to do great things in China and Iran and parts of South America. Christianity continues to grow in Indonesia. And through whole swathes of Eastern and Central Africa.

15. What have we done with this news that we've carried? Sometimes It feels like we can only see our sin and see our failures, our despair, our fear and doubt just like this group did. Have we in the Australia so lost sight of our risen saviour that we remain in our holy huddle behind our four walls?

And they got to witness all of these events. It took so much and yet so little for them to believe.

16. CS Lewis - The Great Divorce, when the busload of people is on their way from grey town up to, what we think of as heaven.

When they get there, they experience reality in such ways that we could have never thought of in grey town. The blades of grass are too real for their feet, and rain is almost too real, penetrating, coming down. And the closer they get to heaven, it's almost like reality is more real.

And wherever they came from was almost like through a glass dimly or kind of a cloud. And I feel that in sight from Lewis with this Jesus coming into their reality. He comes in a more real way.

We think our reality is the realest reality. But Jesus walks through walls. Appears in a locked room. Somehow it is easier for us to think them that that means he is somehow less physical, less substantial. Less material. But maybe it is because he is now more real, more physical.

17. Have a look at this famous Caravaggio painting from the 1600’s.

What strikes you about this painting?

More real, yeah, than the walls around them.

It's so embodied, that picture. I always kind of think of him tucking something into the wound, too. You know, Peter later would say it's by his wounds that were healed.

And I just wonder what Peter or what I sometimes, I put my unfinished work in that wound, you know, and I put my shame in that wound, and my doubt in that wound, and my wounds in that wound. I mean, there is the victory, the defeat of death but that doesn't lead Jesus away from a sympathetic posture, but to even deeper kinds of empathy.

Jesus' hand is guiding Thomas in.

He was not present for Thomas' and yet is for Thomas' statement about, I will not believe unless I can touch these things he is very present.

And so here's this Jesus who shows up and says, do it.
Those wounds are from our sins, and yet this precious strength and vulnerability of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who guides us into that, to transform, are ways that we only know how to harm each other. In doing so, He heals us.

18. We need to hear the story of the risen Jesus over and over. He defeats sin and death and shame and guilt and doubt and fear and evil and power. Replaces it with a promise of a meaningful and true life of sacrificial love.

We belong to this Christ need that reminder.

It comes and finds us in our fear.

And that He comes and finds you and me, and He gathers a community and recreates us all together. What a God that we have, these feet that He washed that we say on the night in which we betrayed Him, that He comes and shows up and says, “Peace be with you.” Yoohoo! If Jesus does it for them he also does it for us.

Peace be with you.

In a world full of hated and anger – peace be with you.

In a world full of division – peace be with you.

In a world full of violence – peace be with you.

In a world full of cruelty – peace be with you.

In a world just waiting for the gotcha moments rather than understanding – peace be with you.

19. And Jesus blesses us here.

He pronounces a blessing on those who are, readers of the Gospel of John, who have not seen and yet believe. That’s us!

I find that so encouraging to feel like, here we are in the story, that's us, that have not seen and yet believe.

Beloved of God, you belong to him. If your life looks anything like mine, it can resemble a tug of war around your own belonging. I mean, even Thomas, we want to identify him by his doubts, as if this is the place of his belonging, but that was not true for Thomas, and it is not true for you, nor for me.

20. Jesus turns up for Thomas. Thomas goes on to take the gospel to India, where by tradition he dies by spear. You can visit the where he landed and planted a church in about 52AD on the Malabar Coast and where he was Martyred in about 72AD near Mylapore near Chennai. Jesus invaded his locked up life and gave it new meaning, purpose and freedom and hope. A new identity.

Jesus invades our locked up lives that can be full of doubts, and he arrives with his very presence, invited or not, you are being pulled into the life of Christ, and it is the place of your truest belonging. You don't belong to your fears, you don't belong to your despair, you don't belong to sickness, even though diagnoses may even try to name you and even take away your abled body. You don't belong to failure, even though failure can shout so loudly in your ears that it owns your future.

You don't belong to hopelessness or injustice or any other dark story. You don't even belong to your own sin. It's been defeated.

Come and feel his hands. Touch his side. The marks that Jesus took, not just the sin of the world, but your sin, your failure.

And he takes it from you. Your God has made peace with you, and he has come to breathe on you his peace again today, so that you may have life in his name.

He renames you – Forgiven, holy, king and a priest, beloved child. He is gazing at you right now.

Reflect