



## **Easter 1**

# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

*O give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good;  
His steadfast love endures for ever!*

*And this is how the world is transformed: through our faith*

John's letter today affirms the promises made by Jesus and proclaimed in John's Gospel. It is a mixture of challenge, promise and commissioning to mission and ministry: *Who is he who conquers the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?* This is wonderful news in that it affirms how there is something within us as Christian which makes us able to transform the world. The world as John uses it is the world that sets itself apart from God, the world in opposition to him. That which enables us to conquer this world is *faith*.

John defines this *world transforming* faith in specific terms: belief that Jesus is the Son of God. It is belief in the Incarnation – that God became man in Jesus of Nazareth and lived among us. It is faith in the saving love of the God who gifted us with salvation in the death of His Son on the cross. It is faith in the rising of the Son by the Father on Easter Sunday morning, a rising that gifts us with a Living Messiah whose presence continues on among us in the faith community gathering in His Name. It is faith in God in the way God offers Himself to us, rather than faith in a God who conforms to our limited expectations, demands and ways.

*Look! We have seen the Lord!*

It is right to call Thomas "Doubting Thomas" but the thing is, Thomas needed help in taking that enormous step in faith. His fellow disciples had come to him proclaiming: *We have seen the Lord!* But then, what did they do? They locked themselves in the upper room, hiding away behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. They were actions that said: *we really do not believe He is risen.* They were still filled with fear. They still locked their doors. Why then would Thomas believe them?

After all, to believe in the risen Christ is to believe that God can take to Himself the brokenness, vulnerabilities, and losses of our lives and redeem them. It is to believe that all other standards of judgments, ways of looking at the world and others, and all other measures of success must be rooted first in the faithfulness to the one who says, *whatever you do for the least, you do for me.* It is, finally, to live in relentless and courageous love, in faith that love has conquered even death. When we proclaim: *Christ is risen! Alleluia!* we must then go on to live in ways that show how faith is deep and genuine. An untransformed post-Easter life casts doubt on faith.

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**Here is the message from Thomas:** for our faith to be real, it has to make a difference to our daily living, to the way we come together as a parish and engage with the world in mission. Onlookers need to experience the difference faith makes to the way we are living, acting, speaking and loving.

There are a lot of people like Thomas “out there” who want to believe but need to first of all *meet* the Risen Christ. They can only do that in us. For those of us who live with the doors and windows locked it is time now to throw them open.

***There was not a needy person among them...***

Our reading from Acts reminds us of the essential nature of community in our profession of faith in the Risen Christ. Our church was not called into existence to be an “upper room”, a place apart from where we can hide away for fear of the world. Jesus spoke of it in terms of being salt, light and yeast for the world, the means by which Jesus is making himself known to others from within their world. This is why those first believers could *go sell all they had* and could *share everything in common*. The important thing was how they did this as a united community, as a single family under God. As brothers and sisters. Unbelievers saw this and wondered – why?

That is the power of coming together in Christ as the living and ministering Body of the Risen and Reigning Christ in the world. To proclaim *Christ Lives* leaves others to ask *Where? How?* The disciples in that Upper Room failed to convince Thomas of the truth of that declaration because their actions said one thing and their words another. He was thus left to struggle with doubt and uncertainty. He wanted to believe but had not been provided a pathway to faith. Rather than judge Thomas for his unbelief, we should be pondering why it is our own faith in the resurrection fails to convince our needy world of the reality of a God who loves them.

***It is really all too much on our own***

The Covid Church is not the Church established by Christ in the world. Disease has forced us to lock ourselves away and to participate in our religious lives in new and distancing ways. We have become Zoom-Christians of necessity, and it has been good for us. Helpful. Limiting. But faith requires more. Christ envisaged living communities of men and women of faith, people who came together as the Body of Christ giving a living witness to what faith in the resurrection means. Each one of us has been baptised into the Church because Christ’s Body here needs the gifts we have been given if it is to prosper and fulfil its mission. In our own unique ways, each of contributes to God’s answer to the prayers of the saints and the needs of the world. We may not think our contribution is all that significant, but if we stay away, then the whole the Body suffers. We are missing an essential ingredient. You. Me. Us. We now need to do for each other what those disciples failed to do for Thomas. As the Evangelist John reminds us, the Christ event is a gift meant for the world. By our living faith in Jesus Christ as the Risen and Reigning Lord, we are collaborating in the saving works of God in creation. Nothing less.

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