



## THOUGHTS FOR LOW SUNDAY EVENING 19 APRIL 2020

*Seeing & Believing*  
John 20:19-end

Like many Readers, I have probably preached more sermons on Low Sunday than any other Sunday of the year, the reason being, of course, that the Vicar is often away that day, earning a well-deserved rest after the exertions of Holy Week and Easter. That leads inevitably to the problem of what one might say that is new and original – not that I flatter myself that anyone (myself included) will remember what I said 25 years ago on this Sunday, but because I would hope that new experience of life would have opened up new insights that merit sharing.

Well, this year there is no shortage of new experience on which to draw, but is there anything in that experience that illuminates faith?

In today's gospel reading we have the familiar story of the disciples huddled together behind locked doors. Well the locked doors may have a contemporary ring in this time of 'lockdown', but all those people huddled together is another matter. Where in former years we might have viewed those fearful disciples with some pity, we this year might sympathise with them behind their locked doors, but envy them that they are together and not on their own. Our lofty sense of superiority that comes from knowing how the story ends seems to me to be strangely absent this year. All the usual certainties of Holy Week, the waiting at the foot of the cross on Good Friday, the blankness of Holy Saturday and the contrasting joy of Easter worship, all depending, I now realise, for me in experiencing these things in the company of others, has been done away this year.

Of course, the mistake I have made is in thinking that I, unlike those first disciples, know how the story ends – I don't, actually, have much of a clue, or, rather, that is all I have, some clues. Some reasons and insights enough, many of them based on the experiences of those first disciples, to have a go at doing what Jesus suggests in his remarks to Thomas and come to believe what I have not seen clearly.

The first of these clues for me has to be my association with the church, the learning of bible stories, the singing of hymns, the liturgical life of the church and what all these things tell of God and, most especially, the way faithful people I know and have known who have lived their lives influenced by their faith. They are too many to list, but as I write they gather together about my desk and urge me on, from the Congregational Sunday school meeting in my Junior School on a Sunday afternoon, through the folk at Holy Trinity, Darnall, S. Oswald's at Durham and another S. Oswald's in York, S. John the Apostle at Whetstone and S. James's, New Barnet to S. Matthew's, Darley Abbey.

Another clue for me was the experience of the risen Lord in my, rather seedy, room in my lodgings in York in about 1977, in a way that I knew could not be held onto, yet which I knew would certainly influence what came after.

Yet another clue came this last Saturday when someone who seemed to have fallen out with me several years ago, and which I had been bemoaning to a friend on the telephone only the day before, approached me as I was cutting our hedge and, from a safe distance, renewed a connection that I had thought completely severed.

So, when I see on television the sufferings that so many are enduring here and round the world during this plague, hear the appalling death toll figures, or overhear a conversation about not seeing much loved grandchildren for weeks, and then hear the stories of heroism in bringing relief and care by so many folk, and also of the petty selfishness of others, are these clues to the end of the story enough?

I dare to hope that they might be. I believe that God's purposes for his creation are wholly loving. I believe that Jesus, by his passion and death not only secured his own resurrection, but that it won the same for us all.

No matter how frightful the disease statistics, how cut off we might feel, or how much we might dread the process of dying, nevertheless, we will end up in God's loving presence and know joy and peace that passes all human understanding.

My prayer is that we may all come not just to believe this, but to know it.

Clive Lemmon