



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Easter 1 (BCP 1662) 2020 8.30 am

1 John 5.4-12 & John 20.19-23

In the name of the risen and living Lord. Amen.

Anxiety, discomfort, even fear have marked the lives of many people around the world over the past few months.

Even if Covid-19 has not directly affected a family member, friend or colleague, each one of us has been living under the virus' long shadow and there can be nobody whose life has not been affected in some way by it.

It is not just the outbreak of a world-wide pandemic, however, that causes anxiety or fear, even small, often irrational things can – and, indeed, do – disturb or frighten us.

In today's gospel, the disciples are afraid - and not without cause.

The disciples have become associated with a recently executed criminal and everyone in Jerusalem knows who they are!

The disciples' lives are in a complete mess. Jesus, once the fixed point of their universe about which their lives have turned, has now become a liability, a painful puzzling

conundrum, and the disciples' future looked even bleaker to them than their miserable frightened present.

But it is into the very midst of their fear, the very heart of their confusion and bewilderment and anxiety that Jesus comes to them.

Jesus stands in their midst, shows them his hands and his side and gives them his 'peace'.

Bizarrely, John tells us, that this 'apparition' did not make them even more frightened, nor did it make them unlock the doors and run out of the Upper Room terrified; rather, they were 'ecstatic'¹ – they were 'bursting with joy'!

The eternal message of Easter is that Jesus comes to us in our fear; into the messiness of our disordered, anxious, troubled, nightmarish lives and he offers us his gift of peace; he comes to make us overflow with an 'uncontainable gladness'.

Whatever our fears, whether well-founded or not, Jesus comes to us; *yes*, he comes wounded and scarred, bearing the marks of the nails and the spear, but he *comes* and he proclaims peace and God's power to transform even the most hopeless-seeming situation with his gift of new life and superabundant joy.

Into the disciples' terror and panic, huddled together for safety behind locked doors in the Upper Room, Jesus comes; Jesus picks them up, gently restores them in God's grace and fills them with joy and peace.

Wherever we are, whatever the circumstance in which we find ourselves today, however tightly we have barred the doors against whatever it is that frightens or disturbs or terrifies the most, the risen Lord Jesus comes, stretches out his wounded hands, shows us his pierced side and he offers us his perfect peace.

It is left to St Luke to continue the story, to pick up where the other Evangelists leave off. St Luke's Acts of the Apostles reveals how the once-frightened, bewildered anxious Disciples become Spirit-filled emboldened Apostles and Evangelists, energised, joy-filled, women and men, held in Christ's peace; finding new and courageous voices in which to proclaim the Resurrection and to sing God's praises.

May we, this Eastertime, let go of our fears and allow the peace of the risen Christ into our lives and may we live those lives in joy.

Alleluia!