

2023-04-16 ... 8am Communion Sermon ... Revd Canon Judy Hunt

John 20: 19 – 31

'News True or False?'

Most of us are probably familiar with the phrase 'Fake News.' How do we decide what is true and what has been manipulated and presented as the truth – but isn't?

The truth of the Easter story comes by way of testimony, starting with Mary Magdalene who finds the tomb empty and speaks to Jesus in the garden. Would she, a woman, be believed? In the time of Jesus, that was unlikely – women were generally of little status; but Jesus called her name and showed her he had indeed risen.

Then there was the testimony of the disciples locked in a room, afraid and disheartened. Jesus appeared to them, letting them see his hands and side, offering Peace and breathing the Holy Spirit on them. Their joy at being in his physical presence encouraged them and dispelled their fear.

Thomas perhaps represents many who find it difficult to believe unless they see it for themselves. His scepticism contrasts with the faith of the others, but is a common trait that many of us will share. Yet, Thomas too came to understand and believe.

Out into the wider community, as the weeks and months move on, there is the testimony of Peter and the apostles talking to the people of Jerusalem. They testified because they were there. Their eyewitness account of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and of his appearing to them after his death, was real and personal; it could be recounted with enthusiasm and confidence.

There is evidence in the behaviour of the disciples who changed from being fearful followers locked away, to talking and telling anyone they meet. They had been encouraged. They had received the blessing of Jesus and the Spirit had been breathed on them.

Then there is evidence of the longevity of the story as it has been preached in churches down the centuries and is still real to people today. Surely 'fake news' would have been found out by now.

Then there is the effect of the story on some who hear it and just know that they know. An inner realisation of truth, a faith that cannot be explained – but is real. As Jesus says to Thomas, '*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*' For hundreds of years Jesus has not been seen physically, but people trust and believe, recognising the values he taught and accept them for themselves.

So how do we measure truth? How do we decide fake news or living reality? On what is our faith built? Maybe on a story – but much more than a story. The Biblical record, the testimony of millions of Christians and a living, life-giving relationship with Jesus who offers us his Peace and his Spirit.