**Sermon - Easter 2 April 11, 2021**

May our reflections on scripture this day inspire us to be strong followers of Jesus in both word and action. Amen.

***“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:30-31***

In our gospel reading this morning, we come to the very end of theGospel of John. The story has been told, and at the close, John returns to the theme of Jesus giving signs.

The theme of signs is a particular characteristic of the Gospel of John, and a key to understanding John’s experience of Jesus. Remember John’s story of Jesus at the wedding in Cana.? ***Jesus did this***, John says, ***the first of his signs….and revealed his glory.***

In chapter 4, He refers to the second sign - Jesus healing the son of a royal official. Elsewhere, the people ask Jesus to give them a sign, so that they might believe. For John the Gospel is full of signs… and John concludes by saying that there are many more not included.

John’s concept of the “sign” is unique among the 4 Gospels, and his understanding of the word is important. For John, the signs are not simply outward miracles that prove Jesus power: …changing water into wine… healing a seriously ill child etc. In John’s Gospel, the signs Jesus does point beyond themselves, beyond the immediate, physical reality of a miracle… They are a revelation of God…

 They do not show Jesus simply as a miracle worker, a great healer, someone with particular gifts. Signs in John’s Gospel demonstrate Jesus as The Revealer of God. Signs… are deeds that speak, and point to meaning beyond themselves.

So that we, the hearers, might come to know and understand these signs, John places Jesus in the role of interpreter. In the many discussions, which Jesus has with his followers, Jesus interprets the signs using a series of what are now familiar images:

***I am the bread of life;***

***I am the vine;***

***I am living water;***

 ***I am light;***

 ***I am the Good Shepherd.***

***I am the resurrection and the life;***

The signs reveal Jesus as Messiah and Son of God; they reveal God’s desire to be in relationship with you and me through Jesus.

***I am the bread that you can eat;***

 ***I am the vine from which you can draw nourishment;***

 ***I am the shepherd who cares for you;***

 ***I am the light for your path;***

And the greatest sign of all: ***I am resurrection and I am life…***

***I have come that you may have life , and have it abundantly.***

For John, it is intensely important that we, as hearers of his Gospel see beyond the practical, physical reality of the miracle or deed… and see the sign. What it means – that it points to our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and therefore to our relationships with one another.

The purpose of the signs, and all their revealed meaning, is to awaken trust in Jesus Christ. And the purpose of this trust is to bring us into an intimate relationship with God through Jesus. As we go through life, there are many people who ask for our trust… we know that not all are trustworthy… These signs are assurance that we can put our trust in Jesus.

But, it doesn’t end there. Jesus’ signs awaken trust and leads to faith… But we cannot simply be passive recipients. We are invited to enter into a personal experience of these signs, to participate in them. For example, when two or three are gathered… for fellowship… for prayer and meditation… or when we gather round the table every Sunday…

… because of his resurrection, Jesus is there with us at the table smiling and encouraging us in the ministry we are doing..

Accounts from the Book of Acts show the early Christians being amazed and full of wonder at their experiences of the Risen Jesus. Peter challenges each of his listeners to be witnesses to the resurrection. It is the call for each of us, that we speak of the Living Christ - in spoken word, and in our way of life. In other words, take your experience of the love of Jesus in our midst here and let it seep into all parts of your life.

So we come to Thomas. Poor Thomas…known as “the doubter”. It’s a bit curious this, for every one of the disciples had to SEE something in order to believe. Mary stood weeping outside the tomb - until she saw Jesus. Peter and the other disciple who went into the tomb had to see the tomb empty and the folded linen cloths until they believed.

So why does Thomas get singled out? John is being a skillful storyteller. He wants to make a point. The last disciple to see Jesus, demanding proof….and Jesus says ***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*** In John’s gospel these are the final words of Jesus…

It has been suggested that John is saying *these stories are written here to awaken your faith, but they are not YOUR experiences; you cannot substitute anyone else’s experience of the resurrection for your own encounter with the risen Christ.* The Easter stories call you to trust in Jesus as the Revealer of God’s Love.

As you experience that living presence, let it seep into all parts of your life, so that you too become a witness to the risen and abundant life of Jesus Christ.

INFSHS. Amen.