

Readings for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

11th May 2025

First Reading: Acts 9:36-43

In Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, 'Please come to us without delay.' So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs.

All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, 'Tabitha, get up.' Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Second Reading: Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, singing, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.'

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

Gospel: St John 10:22-30

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch

them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.'

A Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

From Rev'd David Higgon

Faith and Doubt

Today's reading is set in the Temple in Jerusalem; Jesus is walking through Solomon's Porch during the festival of lights, or Hanukkah. And into this setting again comes the question of his identity: How long will you keep us in suspense, he is asked, if you are the Messiah tell us plainly. Questions of Jesus's identity shadowed him throughout his ministry, from his preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth to the cross itself, where some in the crowd watching him being crucified, say, 'He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one'.

Jesus has performed many miracles and yet the question of his identity remains. It seems no matter what he does, some will never believe him. And as we hear the doubt that creeps into their questions, perhaps it is worth taking a step back and reminding ourselves that doubt is a constant companion to faith.

Many with the strongest of faiths will experience doubt at some time or other. We may doubt our abilities to overcome difficult situations, and we may doubt God's presence in our lives and our closeness to God. My point is that doubt and questioning are normal, and that it is important that we are allowed to voice our doubts. So often in church we talk about faith and that is a powerful thing to talk about, but to not claim the flip side of faith, the perpetual travelling companion of faith — doubt — means we are not leaving room for the real-life experiences of people, and the challenges we face in our world today.

There is something very seductive about certainty. It feels good and it offers clarity in a chaotic world, a sense of control when life feels overwhelming. People crave for certainty. In business management, there is a long-held mantra that there should be no surprises. Shareholders and investors want stability and stable growth for their investments, and they react badly when uncertainty threatens that stability. Hence the turmoil in the financial markets' in reaction to Donald Trump's machinations with trade tariffs.

Paradoxically, it is this need for certainty that the people with the most confident voices often rise to the top, regardless of their ability or expertise. The loudest voices are often dominate—not because they are right, but because they are unshakably sure of their stance. The problem is that when someone clings tightly to their beliefs, they leave little room for alternative perspectives, critical thinking, or the nuance that defines complex issues. On the other hand, doubt is often dismissed as weakness. But in reality, doubt can be a sign of an understanding that the world is complex, that answers are rarely simple, and that our knowledge is inherently limited.

The wisest people are not those who claim to have all the answers, but those who are willing to ask questions—about themselves, their beliefs, and the world around them. Doubt encourages curiosity, fosters open-mindedness, and makes space for learning. It is not a flaw but can be a strength. Embracing our uncertainty can lead to making us kinder, more creative, and more alive, and faith itself is an antidote to the seductiveness of certainty. The monk and spiritual writer Thomas Merton encapsulates this in his prayer of unknowing.

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore, I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.

Prayer Of Unknowing. Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

It is worth for a moment considering this prayer in a bit more detail:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end...

This applies to us as individuals, and to all of us collectively not only to us as a human race but more broadly, as life forms on planet earth. As the systems that underpin biological life are upended, we can predict very little about our future.

Nor do I really know myself...

Advances in science and technology have led to an over confidence in believing that we have all the answers and that we can control nature, but the reality is turning out to be very different. How else could our society do such harm to the natural world and to other humans?

...and the fact that I think I am following Your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

These days, those who claim they are following “God’s will” with absolute certainty, are just as likely to be enacting harm through prejudice and violence as they are to be healing the wounds of the world. On the other hand, those who seek to heal the wounds of the world tend to be comfortable with not knowing.

But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that, if I do this, You will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it.

What if we opened ourselves to guidance from the divine, from God and the earth itself? What if we allowed ourselves to take each step towards healing our planet in harmony with what life itself is asking us to do?

What if addressing the global situation begins by decreasing carbon emissions but doesn’t end there? What if something more than a reconfiguration of resources and habits is being demanded of us? If we are driven by a need for certainty, how will we ever find out? The prayer ends with these words:

Therefore, I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for You are ever with me, and You will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.

The human race certainly seems to be lost in “the shadow of death.” But it is telling that Thomas Merton ends his prayer with an assertive statement - *You are ever with me, and You will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

Could it be that, at this time in the life of our species, the divine is always with us? Could it be that that presence is closer than breath itself? Jesus is telling all doubters that he is one with God, that he knows his followers and all their doubts, and that his followers know him, and that we should trust and hope in him. In all our doubts and uncertainty Jesus is always with us and we can trust in the abundant hope we receive from him -the abundant hope we receive from the body and blood of Christ that we will share in the sacrament this morning.