



Sunday Reflection

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 7 April 2024

Easter 2

**The Rector will preach at St John's :-
and the Rector at St Margaret's :-**

We gather here today, just as the disciples gathered following the momentous news that Jesus had risen from the dead. We encounter the risen Jesus in word and sacrament, and affirm our faith in the living God.

"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." John 20:25

An illustration to set the scene

For many of us, the term "**fake news**" is associated with certain politicians in recent history, although in fact it goes back much further.

The promulgation of false stories for profit or power is probably as old as time and, once the age of mass media arrived with cheap printed newspapers, hoaxes were not uncommon.

One of the most lurid is perhaps the series of articles published in New York in 1835 by *The Sun*, purporting to chronicle the invention by the great astronomer Sir John Herschel of the world's most powerful telescope.

This had, they claimed, enabled him to see that the moon was covered in red flowers, and populated by miniature bison, unicorns and winged humanoids or "man-bats".

In an era of momentous scientific discoveries, it is perhaps not altogether surprising that it was some weeks before the hoax was exposed.

But possibly the first instance of the use of "fake news" as a term was in 1903, when **The Daily Telegram**, a newspaper in Clarksburg, West Virginia, laid a subtle trap for its competitor.

It published a report of a shooting, with the fatality named as a Mr Swenekafew.

The Clarksburg Daily News duly printed the story the next day, thereby confirming that they were in the habit of stealing *The Daily Telegram's* stories.

The alleged fatality's name, spelled backwards, reads "We fake news".

Today's Gospel teaching

Today's Gospel reading certainly describes momentous events.

Following hard on the heels of Mary Magdalene's earth-shattering account of her encounter with the risen Christ, the disciples gather.

We can only imagine their state of mind – fearful of persecution by those who had killed their leader, but full of incredulous hope at Mary's news.

And then they too see Jesus, hear him as he speaks peace to them, as he anoints them with the Holy Spirit to carry on his ministry of forgiveness and liberation.

But there is one who is absent, and who, when he hears their story, dismisses it as fake news, a hoax.

"I'll believe it when I see it," he says in effect.

I will only trust my own physical senses.

Unless I can touch him, I won't believe it.

I'm not going to believe it just because you say it's true.

Thomas is an advocate for exercising critical faculties and fact-checking.

If it seems too good to be true, he implies, it probably is.

A week later, it is Thomas himself who encounters the risen Jesus, who is understanding of his scepticism.

He gives Thomas the tangible evidence he needs, and Thomas is convinced, proclaiming, **“My Lord and my God!”**

But it would have been better, says Jesus, if Thomas had believed the account of credible eyewitnesses.

Providing that account is what John’s Gospel is about.

How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?

For the last two millennia, we have had only these eyewitness accounts to go on.

People have had to decide for themselves whether those accounts are reliable, or if they are fake news.

Many of those who struggle to believe stumble over the seeming impossibility of the resurrection – how can this be factually accurate?

Perhaps it is better to think of the resurrection as a truth with a profound message about the triumph of love over hate, life over death, light over darkness – all of which are alluded to in today’s readings.

But in the end, Thomas – that sceptical challenger of fake news – is convinced by his own experience, and even the most sceptical would-be believer can take confidence from that.

He who refused to be convinced on secondhand evidence is utterly convinced by the reality of the risen person of Jesus.

The Church has given Thomas rather a bad press, but in these times of “alternative” facts, perhaps he teaches us some valuable lessons.

He uses his God-given critical faculties to evaluate the accounts he is presented with, and to test the reliability of his sources.

He requires empirical evidence – the evidence of his own senses – to change his world view.

And he judges the truth against the yardstick of his own experience.

And in the end, he believes.

The risen Christ he believes in is life-changing, not only for Thomas, but for us too.

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