Sermon April 27 2025 ‘Doubting Thomas, faith & us.’ John 20:19-31 & Romans 1: 1-8

 Have you noticed that the BBC News often has an item, now, called “BBC Verify”? This tries to check on the truth behind the ‘spin’, wild assertions (usually from Trump) & assorted claims of others. The BBC is sceptical about the truth or reality behind the news or remarks on social media-exactly as Thomas was in Jn. 20: 25 “So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in His hands & put my finger where the nails were & put my hand into His side, I will not believe it.’” He wanted physical proof of the Resurrection & all it entailed. When Jesus gave him this proof, he accepted the Resurrection- “My Lord & my God!” We’ll look at what this meant later.

 Jesus touches on the need to verify this claim-“Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen & yet believed” (v.29). He explains how this can happen. Many of Jesus’ “miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples…are not recorded in this book. But these are written that that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son God, & that by believing you may have life in His name.”(vv. 30-31). The Holy Spirit uses what is recorded in this gospel & Scripture to strike home to our hearts & minds that Jesus is Divine, the Christ & the Saviour. Besides using Scripture, the Holy Spirit makes clear the effect on others of the changed life of believers to convince us that He is who He says He is & can be trusted to transform us, too. “By believing you may have life in His name.” This is life at its best-a life of peace & compassion-when helping others is more important than, vaingloriously, trying to get on. This is the eternal life of which Jesus speaks in Jn. 17: 3-“Now this is eternal life; that they may know you the only true God & Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” The heart of this life is knowing Jesus Christ-a personal relationship with Him-not knowing about Him-but a friendship with Him. In the Old Testament Abraham was described as ‘the friend of God’, while Moses spoke to the Lord as to his brother. Thus, knowing Him will lead to transformed lives. When I became a Christian, two remarks had a great impact on me-one from Scripture was Jesus being described as “the friend of sinners”-how amazing was that! The other was “beware of the barrenness of a busy life.” I was busy at the time, but what was it all for? Were we just like a fly trying to get out of a stopped bottle? Secondly, I met a group of young Christian men, who invited me to a regular Bible Study meeting. In that fellowship, it was clear they had something that I did not-it turned out to be’ Someone’ not ‘something’! So God’s word & the transforming effect of believing in Him on believers’ lives enabled me not having seen yet to believe.

 What is the meaning of Thomas’ statement of belief “My Lord & my God.”? Our second reading-Romans 1: 1-8 can help going in reverse order. Paul defines Jesus as being both human & God ( v. 3 & 4). “As to his human nature (He) was a descendant of David, & who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrections from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is the Resurrection that proclaims He must be God. It was in the interest of both the Romans & the Jewish elite to produce His body, but they never did. And again why did the disciples so shattered, reclusive & dispersed after the Crucifixion suddenly emerge after Pentecost to proclaim that He was alive & the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, if they knew that was untrue? Would they risk everything for a lie?

 “My Lord”-Paul talks of the Gentiles being called “to the obedience that comes from faith” v. 5. Faith in the sense of belief in & commitment to Jesus leads to accepting that He is the boss- believers will want to do what pleases Him in behaviour & the major decisions of life rather than pleasing themselves. This should lead to transformed lives, even though that will be a slow process. He goes on to say that believers are “called to belong to Jesus Christ” (v. 6). He is the Good Shepherd-compassionate & protective. They are, also, “called to be saints” (v. 7), which means called to be set apart or distinctive-the slow change to being just a little bit more Christ like. This is so different from the popular view of saints as being holier than thou or judgemental. Lastly, Paul talks of believers as being “loved by God” (v. 7). How powerful is that, especially, in the modern world? It has, probably, always been the case that many have, over the years, not felt really loved nor supported-they had no one rooting for them. Perhaps, they have not had good role models, so they felt rootless, floating along like bits of driftwood. To them, of course, the appeal of a gang, however immoral, is so attractive. They will feet part of something greater than themselves, appreciated & supported, perhaps for the wrong reasons, but nonetheless supported. The believer, however, is loved by God & called to be part of His gang, as it were-how powerful is that?

 How can this episode about Doubting Thomas coming to faith help us? Firstly, we are those who have not seen in the way Thomas did “yet believe.” Some bit or bits of God’s word have been carried home to us convincingly by the Holy Spirit. As has the transforming effect of faith in the life of people we’ve met. We’ve been struck by what belonging to Jesus & loved by God has done to them.

 Secondly, in John 20: 21 Jesus says “as the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.” We should go out with the humility, approachability & compassion of our Lord.

 Lastly, there is the message that Jesus seeks to be the Lord & God of everyone –so that they may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God & that” by believing (they) may have life in His name.” John 20: 31.