**THE BEST GIFT**

**The Gospel of John was written ninety years after the resurrection of our Lord. It was too long a time span for John the Disciple to have written this Gospel. We don’t know who wrote it; even the historians and no one else knows. However, I think it important to be aware that the Disciple John didn’t write this Gospel. Because he knew Jesus and he knew the risen Lord, he couldn’t have written what was in the opening of these passages. He knew Christ’s message was all about love, justice and peace and certainly equality for all people. Jesus included everyone in his teachings; not one woman was left out, not one child was left out, not one man Jew or Greek or Roman. Nor not one LGBT person was left out, or any other minority then or now. He taught love your neighbor, care for the homeless, the sick, the wounded, the blind, care for everyone. He taught us to take care of one another, no caveats, no exceptions to his rule of love.**

**What the person who wrote this Gospel said in his opening statement is disturbing. He told us the disciples were behind a closed and locked door, because they were afraid of the Jews. Would Jesus ever have taught his disciples to be afraid of the Jews, or women, or children, or any other group of people? John the Disciple never wrote these words and we probably never will know who did write them. Perhaps this Gospel writer’s name was John, or perhaps he admired the Disciple John and so wrote this Gospel under the name John. But I don’t believe a disciple of our Lord could write down such words saying the disciples locked themselves away because they were afraid of the Jews. Those words of fear have echoed throughout the centuries.**

**They have caused great harm and infinite sorrow. They echoed in the Concentration Camps and even today they resound in the threats to Jewish Community Centers. They cause thoughts such as us versus them. They reverberate in statements made today about many different groups. When we hear statements linking all Muslins with terrorism, and when we realize once again LGBT people are being targeted along with many other groups. We can trace some of this hatred and fear of the other to the statement made in the Gospel of John, telling us the disciples were afraid of the Jews.**

**In this Gospel fear of the Jews is mentioned in another part by the person who wrote it. The Gospel writer wrote, “After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him.” I don’t believe Jesus was ever afraid. Why would he be afraid of the tribe of people he was part of; he was raised a Jew and lived out his life as a Jew. He was often angry with some of the Sadducees, Pharisees and scribes, but righteous anger is different than being afraid of all of your own people. No one who knew Jesus would have called him afraid as he rode his small white steed into Jerusalem. No one would have called him fearful if they saw him standing silently at his trial, absolutely knowing he was going to his own human death.**

**Whoever wrote the Gospel of John had frailties and so also within him had a dark side of his personality, as we all do. Unfortunately, part of his dark side was set down on parchment and has lived through all these centuries. It has implicitly given permission for people to hate and harm Jews, and tacitly given permission for people to hate and harm other groups of people. Yet it’s good to remember his references to Jews had nothing to do with the teachings of Jesus. Also these two references had nothing to do with all the good thoughts this Gospel writer wrote down for us to learn from throughout the centuries. His dark side showed itself in the references to Jews and fear. Yet he also had a very spirit- filled side and wrote many profound and beautiful passages.**

**In this story we have a great lesson the Gospel writer is relating to us about our Lord Jesus Christ. The Disciple Thomas was with Jesus throughout his ministry, he was with him at Jesus’ human death, and yet within Thomas’s heart was this great big seed of doubt. He wondered was Jesus really the son of God, did he really rise from the dead? After the death of our Lord, the times were tremulous. Earthquakes, a sky as dark as night and even the curtain in the holiest of holy the Temple was torn asunder. The disciples didn’t know what to do, or where to turn; they were rudderless. Then one night, unexpectedly the risen Christ appeared before them and gave them the living presence of the Holy Spirit within each of them.**

**But Thomas wasn’t there that evening. He didn’t see the risen Lord, he didn’t receive the Holy Spirit, and so his doubts continued. He asked himself was this the one they had been waiting for? Was Jesus the Messiah or simply a good man? Then in a week Jesus appeared before his disciples and Thomas was there. He said to Thomas put your fingers in my wounds, and do not doubt but believe. Then and only then did Thomas believe and cried out to Jesus, “My Lord and my God.” Yet Thomas’ doubt and his finally believing in Christ as the risen Lord, is not the important part of this story. The whole of Doubting Thomas’ story serves as the introduction and precursor to the lesson we can learn. Even when Jesus asked Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me”? is not the significant question of this Gospel reading. The last question Jesus asked is the most vital part of the entire passage, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”**

**We are not privileged to have seen with our own eyes the risen Christ. We were not there when he breathed on his disciples and gave them the presence of the Holy Spirit within each of them. We believe not because we have seen his physical appearance as the Risen Christ. We believe because we feel his presence in our hearts. We believe because we know we have been touched by the Holy Spirit. We believe because of all the good that affects us every day of our lives. We believe because we know without a doubt the risen Christ is the best gift we will ever receive.**