



## St Thomas: Easter 2 2020

Today the focus on our gospel reading is on St Thomas: ‘Doubting Thomas’ a familiar phrase, used as an expression when someone won’t believe what is before their eyes.

We first meet Thomas in John chapter **11**. He stands out as the disciple who is prepared to go with Jesus to the tomb of Lazarus even if it means death. The other disciples warn Jesus not to do so as returning to Judea is dangerous for him. But Thomas says to his fellow disciples, *‘Let us go also that we may die with him.’* Here is one of the earliest expressions of readiness to follow Jesus in the costly path that he would take to the cross.

We meet Thomas again in John chapter **14**. Here he takes Jesus seriously enough to question him further when Jesus speaks of his going to prepare a place for them in his father’s house. Jesus assures the disciples that

they, *'know the way to the place where they are going'* But Thomas pushes for more clarity, *'Lord we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way'*. His question draws out a wonderful reassurance from Jesus, *'I am the way, the truth and the life.'* So through Thomas' questioning, we, as later readers of the gospel, receive this gift of Christ's words for our own understanding.

And then we come to today's gospel reading. Thomas was not present with the other disciples when Christ first appeared to them in the upper room and as they told him excitedly about it, he remained guarded in his response *'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.'* Understandable perhaps, if you feel that you have missed out on something significant, it is human nature to dismiss other's experience, when you feel that you should have been in on the act too. There is something very human and real about that response from Thomas.

It is a week later when Christ returns to the still locked room, bringing a greeting of peace and inviting Thomas to indeed touch his wounds. A week has passed, a week where Thomas was not able to publicly commit to the faith that the other disciples were coming to understand. But his doubts do not set him apart from that community of faith, he belongs in that room. His honest struggle is a part of faith, not a denial of it.

I'm sure many of you know the wonderful book and film *'The life of Pi.'* In the early part of the film there is a conversation between the adult Pi and a young writer. Pi comments, *'Faith is a house with many rooms.'* The writer asks him if there is room for doubt and Pi responds *'oh, plenty on every floor. Doubt is useful; it keeps faith a living thing. After all you cannot know the strength of your faith until it is tested.'*

We too can pursue our faith through our doubts, through our questioning. The tough realities of life can test faith, especially suffering, as we endure

it or witness it. Perhaps this year that picture of disciples gathered behind locked doors has a greater resonance for us. When the Risen Christ first comes to speak 'peace' into their hearts and minds, he isn't coming to people who are experiencing life as 'perfectly fine, thank you' he comes to a group who are lost and fearful. The world as they have known it, lived in close communion with Jesus, collapsed around them with the events that we follow through 'Holy Week.' The source of their fears and confusion may be different from ours, but it is fear and confusion nonetheless. They experience disillusionment and loss of hope (remember they left everything to follow him), they are unsure what the future will hold. We can identify with that when Covid-19 has closed so many doors and given us an uncertain future.

And when Jesus comes again a week later, they are still in the house with doors shut and again he needs to speak words of peace, but he comes also to meet Thomas in his doubts, to help him to renewed faith. The gentle words of Christ offer to Thomas the opportunity that he sought. He invites Thomas to 'see the wounds in his hands, and to place his hand in His wounded side.' Thomas is invited to encounter Jesus for himself.

Sometimes in our journey of faith we may feel like Thomas the apostle, we too find ourselves alongside those who are certain in their faith 'whatever the weather', but deep within us we are aware of our own doubts and fears. Perhaps having the courage to name those struggles makes it easier for us to encounter afresh the reality of Christ that will draw forth renewed faith from us.

The tangible presence of Christ before Thomas is enough to renew his faith when doubt and disbelief had captured his heart and mind: 'My Lord and My God.' The wounds remind him that the resurrected Christ is the same Jesus whose wounds demonstrate his love soaked offering of himself, his cross shaped identification with the sufferings of the world.

Those wounds once weeping with the pus of human sin and the blood of human suffering, he takes into his resurrected life. The scars ever present in his hands, feet and side. Thomas is offered something new, that The Resurrected Jesus is our hope when fear and doubt capture our hearts.

There are many works of art that have captured this touching story. Caravaggio's painting of this scene is both beautiful and shocking in its portrayal of the moment when Thomas is helped by the resurrected Jesus to a renewal of his faith. The artist's skill of using light and darkness to bring into focus Christ's hand laid on Thomas' arm guiding him to place his finger in the wound of His side should shock us or revulse us, but somehow it does neither. Instead we see a tender concern by our Lord for one who needs that gesture in order to renew his faith. What Thomas seeks is to know that the one who stands before him is the same Lord who walked the earth with him: 'My Lord and My God' that is the confession of faith drawn out of him as he draws near to Christ's wounds.

That same hand can guide us to a renewal of our own faith in one who though risen and glorified is still the crucified one. One writer comments, The 'marks' remain so that we are 'reminded that the resurrection does not wipe away the crucifixion but completes it, as Christ has not come back unharmed to this life, but rather has gone forward, indelibly marked with the signs of his self giving love, into the new kind of life began with this resurrection'.

Richard J Ounsworth <https://www.english.op.org/torch/moulded-in-his-image> /Malcolm Guite 'St Thomas 'Sounding the Seasons' CP 2017

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**Oh doubting Thomas, father of my faith,  
You put your finger on the nub of things  
We cannot love some disembodied wraith,  
But flesh and blood must be our king of kings.  
Your teaching is to touch, embrace, anoint,  
Feel after Him and find Him in the flesh.  
Because He loved your awkward counter-point  
The Word has heard and granted you your wish.  
Oh place my hands with yours, help me divine  
The wounded God whose wounds are healing mine.**