

## Trinity 3 and also St Thomas' Day

**The Collect:** Almighty and eternal God,  
who, for the firmer foundation of our faith,  
allowed your holy apostle Thomas to doubt the resurrection of your Son  
till word and sight convinced him:  
grant to us, who have not seen, that we also may believe  
and so confess Christ as our Lord and our God;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

### **Bible Readings: Ephesians 2:19-end**

<sup>19</sup> Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

### **John 20:24-29 (NRSV)**

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin<sup>[a]</sup>), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

## **Sermon. Thomas. Revd David Treharne**

There are some really interesting and important things to draw out from the feast day of St Thomas. Of course there is the doubt, and we'll come to that.

To begin with, let's just take some context. Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection but for whatever reason, Thomas missed Jesus's first resurrection appearance to the group of disciples in the locked room.

I can imagine that after Jesus appeared to them they didn't half talk about what had happened... and share the story.

### **Sharing story.**

That's the first thing I want to draw out... telling our stories about our encounters with God. I love our gatherings to talk about life and faith, and particularly Wednesday morning gatherings in Café on the Hill Life Group... the sharing of story. It's important to pass on what we have seen and what we have heard about our God encounters. It builds faith and hope. It encourages. It can lead people to their own encounters with the Lord and lead to a confession "My Lord and my God".

### **Missing out.**

So here you have the disciples sharing their stories about how they have seen Jesus, but of course Thomas hadn't been a part of that story which must have been a source of regret and great frustration. He possibly felt quite excluded.

Now, something occurred to me about this.

Thomas hadn't shared in the resurrection encounter, yet he was still there amongst the disciples. We will come to his doubt, but I just want us to commend the faithfulness of Thomas in hanging around whilst everyone else had had this amazing spiritual experience and was on cloud nine. Despite not having shared that experience Thomas stuck around and he waited!

Have you ever been away from church or missed for some reason and you come back and people say "*oh, that was the most amazing worship ever?*" "*The presence of God was incredible.*" You can feel as though you've missed out. In some cases people might say they've had this or that experience of God but it hasn't been YOUR experience.

I just want to commend those of us who stick around and remain faithful, committed and devoted like Thomas. Whilst others might rejoice in blessing or be floating around having had an experience of God... that may not have been your story and experience, but you remain faithful.

There has to be space to hold both those who encounter God and share their experience and those who are waiting and for whom this encounter has not been their experience.

And those who are still waiting for their encounter with God... I do believe that Christ will meet with them.

### **Holding people who have setbacks.**

Another thing that occurred to me about Thomas was that he had had faith in Jesus, then there was a rather large setback with Jesus' crucifixion and death and then he had the encounter with the risen Jesus as we heard in the reading today.

I think Thomas' faith doubt faith journey can speak to many of us. We too will probably have setbacks in our faith and times when doubt will overwhelm us.

When Thomas had a setback he remained a part of the that faith community and was hopefully held by that community. There is a big part of us to play in carrying those who are struggling, who have had setbacks and maybe have big doubts. They still need to feel they can be a part of things and be held by the faith of others.

Many of us will go through periods of significant doubt, and we need to be patient and gracious with one another when this happens.

### **Good doubt**

Now obviously we want to build and encourage faith and not fan the flames of doubt. However, doubt is a part of faith.

"Faith which does not doubt is dead faith."—Miguel de Unamuno. Spanish Philosopher... 1864 – 1936.

"It is not as a child that I believe and confess Jesus Christ. My hosanna is born of a furnace of doubt."-- Fyodor Dostoyevski Novelist 1821-1881.

"Doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith." --Paul Tillich 1886-1965. German American Theologian and Philosopher.

Doubt is a reality that we all have to deal with in our Christian lives. Doubting God's love for us and for others. Doubting his presence and power. Doubting his forgiveness. Doubting his actual existence. Doubting the Church and/or the Scriptures!

The Gospels are not afraid to let doubt sit alongside the resurrection appearances, just as many of the psalms let faith and doubt interact in prayerful tension. Even at Jesus's final appearance to the disciples, they worshipped him, but "some doubted" (Matthew 28.16).

### ***Good / normal doubt.***

- Bad stuff and tough setbacks happen and it causes us to doubt. That's normal.
- Ask questions - ++ Rowan, "If you don't ask the questions you won't find the answers."
- Doubt can lead us to seek after God and trying to discover
- The more seriously we take our faith... the more importance it has in our lives the more doubts emerge because more depends on it. Think about those quiz shows such as 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire'... the doubts creep in the more that rides on it.
- Many Biblical characters doubted. Abraham, Moses, Gideon, The Psalmist.

### ***Not so Good Doubt***

However, there is also a not so good doubt that if it persists can be quite spiritually damaging. If we get to a permanent state of

- No expectancy – God won't or God can't
- Discouraging, negative, beyond cynical, destructive – we have an effect on others
- Excuse not to make a commitment. Excuse for mediocrity, apathy and indifference.
- End up saying "no to God..." and fall into a state of apathy and indifference to the the Kingdom and the Spirit of God.

Doubt seeking faith is different to doubt seeking to doubt! (*you may need to read that twice*)

In such instances we probably need to hear Jesus' words of rebuke that he spoke to Thomas "Stop doubting and believe".

Jesus speaks peace and forgiveness... and he speaks challenge and rebuke... the right word at the right time!!

The word of challenge and rebuke is exactly what Thomas needed and he makes that wonderful confession, "My Lord and my God" and moves forward in his faith and became a powerful witness. Indeed, tradition tells us that Thomas travelled to southern India to proclaim the resurrection; and the Mar Thoma Churches there bear his name.

### **Some Questions for reflection/discussion**

**Telling story.** How easy do you find it to tell your stories of hope, life, God encounters and resurrection? Do you have stories to tell? How do you feel when others tell their stories?

**Spiritual experience.** Have you ever noticed that Thomas was still around the other disciples despite his doubts and their faith? Have you ever been one of those people who ‘missed out’ when God has done something? How did you feel? How have you felt when you have had an experience but someone else doesn’t share/agree with that experience?

**Journeying together.** How can we hold faith and doubt together? Is there space for people to doubt in our church community? Might you be able to say “we believe” even if you’re struggling with doubts?

**Setbacks.** Have there been times when a setback in life has led you to a confession of faith... “My Lord and my God”?

Questions. How might we avoid entering the realm of ‘unhealthy doubt?’

Thomas received a bit of a challenge/rebuke from Jesus “do not doubt but believe.” Is there a place for reproach and admonition?

Jesus spoke the right words of response to his disciples at the right time... peace and rebuke. How can we ensure we do the same?