

Sermon for Online Service: Pott Shrigley 29 March 2020

John 20.19-31 Doubting Thomas

Thomas: he doesn't come so well out of the Easter story; he emerges with a not very flattering nickname, based on Jesus' words to him: 'Stop your doubting, and believe!' *Doubting Thomas*.

It was on this day - that is, a week on from the day of Jesus' resurrection - that Thomas' famous doubts were finally laid to rest. As we know from our Bible reading, he had missed out on the wondrous moment of Jesus' first appearance to his disciples, on the first Easter day. For some reason, he was not present when the risen Lord came.

When he returned to the house, he couldn't fathom what had happened.

He did know certain facts, though.

Firstly, he knew that, when he left his friends, earlier that evening, they were huddled together in fear behind locked doors. They were in a self-imposed lockdown – all too aware that those who killed Jesus might now be coming for them. Indeed, maybe Thomas was the only one brave enough to venture out for supplies.

Equally, he knew that now they were changed men. All fear was gone. Jesus, they said, had greeted them with one word – Peace – and there was no denying that peace, together with hope, joy, faith, now radiated from their faces.

Finally, he knew one other thing: dead people stay dead. And Jesus was dead.

So there was only one thing for it. Demand the same proof that his friends had received. Demand to see – to touch – Jesus. Without that proof, he would not change his view. He would not believe.

It's almost as if he had imposed a new form of lockdown on himself. Locked into his doubts, and insisting that the lockdown would be lifted if, and only if, he could meet physically with the risen Lord.

Maybe you, like me, have a sneaking sympathy for Thomas. The others had had proof, why not he? And, anyway, secretly, perhaps he pined to meet with, to

touch, his friend one more time: and in these days of social distancing, we all know how *that* feels.

But it can be very destructive to lock yourself into your doubts: to hold on to them, to nurse and nurture them; to define yourself by them – maybe even to wear them as a badge of honour. When we do this, we make it harder and harder for God to reach through to us – as Jesus reached through to Thomas.

You see, I think it is more in sadness than anger that Jesus chastises Thomas – ‘Stop your doubting and believe’. He knows that Thomas was this close to walling himself into a prison of unbelief from which it would have been very difficult to escape.

But Jesus also warns Thomas for our benefit; for us, who certainly will *not* see the risen body of Jesus, and yet are invited to believe. ‘Blessed are those who have *not* seen me, and yet believe’.

As a vicar, people often tell me that they identify with Thomas. They have doubts, questions, and they assume they are in a minority; that most people of faith have none. Whereas, in fact, doubt is a part of the normal journey of faith. Faith is not having *no* doubts, it is putting our trust in God *despite* our doubts (repeat?)

In fact, Thomas unintentionally gives us a picture of faith, of belief, of trust in God. Deep down, Thomas simply yearns to reach out and touch Jesus, to connect with him, to be with him; if he can just make that connection, his doubts, his questioning will fade into insignificance.

That’s all that faith is; not knowing all the answers, having no questions, no doubts; it is just reaching out and touching the risen Lord.

He’ll take it from there.