

I like Thomas! He reminds me of myself. He reminds me of all the times people have tried to tell me things I didn't want to hear or believe. Whether it is a movie or a book that someone is raving about, that I feel like I need to see for myself before I believe them, till it's an event in history.

I was talking with my Dad during the week about things we remember, and how we remember them. So often it is linked to another major global event which marks something smaller in our memory. We were sharing memories about where we were the day... someone died, or a bomb exploded, or a baby was born. It made me realise that so often when we are told of a huge event the first thing we do is check out the source. And in fact all our readings today, not just John's gospel are about cementing in the early churches memory where they were, and what behaviour was now expected – now that Jesus had risen from the dead.

If we can remember where we were the day and time we heard about 9/11 or when Princess Diana died, or for the opening of the London Olympics – how much more will the early Christians remember an event as amazing as the resurrection. And yet it was an event that was so hard to process – there was so much to take in.

Any of us who have experienced grief know how much you hope that the person you have lost is not really gone. Knows the anguish of grieving. Knows that you feel that you will never be able to live with this pain again. The disciples were in this pain, in this grief only to suddenly have the risen Jesus standing before them in a locked room!

Their emotions of disbelief and fear would have been extremely high. They were already fearful that others would want to kill them to shut down any stories of Jesus resurrection which were already emerging – and here – in the height of their fear – Jesus stands before them. It is no wonder that Thomas cannot believe their madness – or questions their reality.

Thomas is not really a Saint of Doubt – he is a Saint of realism and truth. He is an example especially in the Gospel of John of all those who have been sceptical of the ministry and miracles of Jesus. John is writing to a community who is both trying to understand who Jesus is and also how he relates to their first century context.

The evangelist, John, knows this. John's gospel exhibits a pattern in which someone hears about Jesus and needs more -- and then receives what they need to come to their own experience of the life Jesus is embodying in the world. The earliest example is in John 1, when Philip says to Nathaniel, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth" (John 1:45) Nathaniel replies with scepticism: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" All Philip can say in reply is, "Come and see." Nathaniel will have to encounter Jesus and draw his own conclusion¹. We talked about this experience during Lent and the power of the question ask. This

¹ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3619

pattern also takes place a number of times in this Gospel – the woman at the well, Mary telling the disciples Jesus is risen – there is a pattern of hearing something, but also understanding that in the end each follower, each convert needs to make up their own mind about who Jesus is – and the truth of the resurrection.

This doesn't mean we all have to start from the beginning – but it does mean we each need to ask the questions that allow us to come to deeper understanding of who Jesus is, and how we live out faith.

The account in the Acts of the Apostles, and that recorded in 1 John also have an element of this. They are recorded to help the emerging church understand what it means to be followers of Christ.

Last Sunday when we baptised Ardalan, I was struck by the statement of faith which he made. He said *I will not share the story of bad that might have led to my decision, rather that I will tell you why I have decided that Jesus is the person I want to follow. The more that I read I understand that he is a man of love and of compassion, and that is the man that I want to be.*

Ardalan is right. We each come to our statement of faith by finding out, by asking questions about who Jesus is; and why we choose to follow. This is what Thomas is doing too – who is this person who has appeared to you in the room – is it really Jesus? We should never be afraid to ask the questions that help us grow in faith or come to a greater understanding of our purpose in the world – or what God is calling to us.

So what then of Jesus statement to Thomas *"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*²

The truth is there are some who don't need to question – they just know. Jesus also understood that all of the disciples had needed to see him so that they might continue to share his story with conviction. He also understands that each of us learn and process in different ways. And Jesus is right, it is a blessing to have a faith that allows you to stand firm, to trust –without proof. Because in fact all the generations that followed would have to do this at some level – including ourselves!

So how do we see the resurrection? What for us confirms that we too can be Easter people? When were we able to say or even believe that this story of the resurrection is powerful enough for us to be part of this story?

No doubt for each of us it will be a different point or time, and maybe even a different story – whatever it is we are invited to have the courage to share that story because it is in the story that we bring about the hope that Easter promises.

The challenge of course is what we do with the news of Jesus resurrection. Over the next 6 weeks we explore different accounts of Jesus appearance until the feast of the

² John 20:29

ascension and we hear how the disciples each responded. We hear of their courage of sharing the news. We will hear stories of how the early church grew and spread. We will also share our frustration that the peace and justice, love and joy which Jesus envisaged and hoped for has never been fully realised. Yet despite this frustration we have never given up the pursuit of faith – for we do believe that change can happen.

During the week I was reading a post which Aunty Margaret (whom some of you met last year when she visited) shared on face book. She and her husband work in the academic science community in Australia; and she shared a post of a statement from Gus Speth a US Adviser on climate change. He said this:

“I used to think that top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation. And we scientists don’t know how to do that.”³

It is a very challenging observation but is in fact very true. The top problems for all change are *selfishness, greed and apathy*. We do want change, but so many don’t want it to affect negatively on them, and challenge their way of life or comfort. It is the same so often when we look at faith. Change is limited by individuality and greed, as much as it is lack of faith.

So often when we look at faith we talk about the need to let go – We have to let go of what we think faith might look like; we have to let go of controlling our lives and letting God; we have to let go of our need to be the most important thing and allow God to be that. It is a hard call and a hard sell – and it is what each of the readings that we have heard today are trying to challenge us with.

The resurrection may not be what was expected – Jesus may not be who we thought – our ability to live out this faith may not go as we imagined - but it doesn’t stop the perseverance that enables us to hold on. I suspect like Dr Speth – we too often feel like we don’t know how to bring about the changes which God is asking for.

Maybe in the end what we can do though is take courage from Thomas. Who wasn’t sure, but had the courage to ask. Who was missing when the important stuff happened but took the time to still have the experience. And who in the end knelt before Jesus and said ‘My Lord and my God! **Amen.**

³ <http://winewaterwatch.org/2016/05/we-scientists-dont-know-how-to-do-that-what-a-commentary/>