

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, or even something more important – like breaking news or the death of someone I loved. I can vividly remember moments in my life when I have had to see something or hear something for myself before I could believe it.

Grief is a difficult thing – and it is something that we will all experience in our own way. For many the experience of grief plays out in the hope that the person has not gone – our longing to see them again – for one last conversation or smile. 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.

On Friday as I watched the wall- to- wall coverage of the death of his RH The Prince of Wales – I was struck again by the power of memories which grief creates. How our grief is comforted and held in the sharing of stories. Not one person who was asked on Friday about the Prince was short of a story, of a time they met or remembered. And it has been clear in our remembering of such an influential man, that we were also remembering others who have touched our lives and we see know more.

As I wondered yesterday, I wondered about the disciples and the stories they must have been sharing together – their memories of Jesus and the experiences they had had. All our readings today, not just John's gospel, are about the early church sharing its stories - its memory of who they were, and what behaviour was now expected – now that Jesus had risen from the dead.

How we remember events; forms and shapes us. Where we were when some events took place; things we might feel we missed out on – all shape us. For the early Christian community, where they were at the time of the resurrection was such an event that shaped their forming faith.

Thomas is not really a Saint of Doubt – he is a Saint of the truly human. He is an example of how each of us might respond in a time of grief or fear. John is writing to a community who is both trying to understand who Jesus is and the consequences of all that has happened.

The way John's write creates a memory of sorts – there is a pattern which is established in which someone hears about Jesus but needs more -- then they have this experience, and their understanding of Jesus grows. The earliest example is

when Philip says to Nathaniel he has found the Messiah (John1) ,and 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. This 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 and make it part of our story.

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. They are forming a foundation. Building a collective story – so that we can continue to understand.

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? 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 story of when we were able to accept the promises of the Easter, or maybe we like Thomas we still have questions we want to ask, or maybe we are still looking for proof.

The challenge of course is what we do with the news of Jesus resurrection. At the heart of this message is a promise, a promise that death is not the end. In a time of National Mourning, this is an important promise to hold onto; as we tell our own stories not only of encounter and grief; but our own stories of hope and resurrection.

Like for Thomas, we are invited to be open to seeing that Jesus is with us; that even when we are not present God is at work in and around us; that by believing and sharing stories of the resurrection we build a community of hope, justice, perseverance, and grace.

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

² John 20:29

Maybe in the end, I find rather than doubt I take courage from Thomas. Who wasn't sure, but who wasn't afraid to ask. Who was missing when the important stuff happened and struggled to find his place in the story. And yet, in the end, Thomas knelt before Jesus and said 'My Lord and my God! **Amen.**