

Believe it!

[John 20:19-31](#), [Acts 2: 14a, 22-32](#)

Go on, prove it.

How am I supposed to believe that?

You're telling me a fairy story, and I'm no child.

If it's not there, before my very eyes,

under my fingers,

in my hands

It's not true.

You can believe it if you like,

If it makes you feel better,

If it helps you make sense

of this locked-down world.

Thomas was not there when Jesus appeared to the disciples in their locked upper room. It can be very easy to criticise him, to use the nickname "Doubting Thomas" for him, to focus on his suspicion of the disciples' excited report, "We have seen the Lord!"

Thomas comes across as a realist. He struggles to grasp some of Jesus' use of metaphorical language, most memorably when Jesus tells the disciples, "you know the way to the place where I am going," and he fires back, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (*John 14:5*) He becomes frustrated with these floaty figures of speech which he doesn't "get".

What was going through his mind when the other disciples met him with the bizarre news that they had seen the Lord? Maybe the strain of being shut behind locked doors "for fear of the Jews" had got to them; maybe one of them had had a vivid dream or hallucination and the disciples' desperate desire to see Jesus alive and present with them again made them all believe that this vision was real. That would make sense, and Thomas is all for making sense of things.

Thomas wants to test out their declaration using his senses: seeing isn't enough. He doesn't just want to see the nail marks, but to touch them: "unless I put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side." He doesn't trust eyesight alone.

A week goes by, and nothing happens. The disciples gather again, this time with Thomas present. The doors are locked fast, yet again. A week would feel like a very long time in such a lockdown, with nothing to confirm the disciples' excitement.

How did Thomas react to this period of nothing happening? Was he envious of the others and their burning belief in the fact that Jesus was risen from the dead? Or, did he look on them and feel sorry for them, that they couldn't see that they were trusting in the impossible? Was he thinking, "Told you so?"

Is it any wonder that he doubted? And, if you look at the descriptions of Jesus' first appearing to his disciples in the other Gospel accounts, it's not just Thomas who expresses doubts about Jesus' resurrection. In Luke's Gospel, the disciples think they have seen a ghost, and Jesus says to them all, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?" (Luke 24: 38)

Jesus doesn't criticise Thomas for his doubts. He greets him – and his doubts. The first thing he says is, "Peace be with you", as he did when he appeared to the disciples a week earlier. Jesus brings peace to the depths of his doubts and fears, not reproach. It is only after that gift of peace has been received that Jesus can say, "Stop doubting."

Doubting Thomas, Thomas the duffer, Thomas the one who needed the proof under his fingertips. We can heap all those phrases on him, yet they are unfair. Thomas is honest about his doubts – there is a raw integrity in them. Furthermore, Thomas is no duffer, for it is he who utters the cry of faith which rings down through the ages: "My Lord and my God!"

Thomas is the encouragement that we all need. He shows that questioning is OK. Not being OK is OK. It can take a long time to wrestle with the reality of Jesus as risen Lord and to accept him as "my Lord and my God". Thomas had walked with Jesus and shared three years experiencing him at work, even seeing Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. It can be a massive step to believe the whole truth of Jesus as risen Lord.

Thomas also shows us that even when we are unaware of God's presence, this does not mean that he is absent.

Our current period of lockdown may make us wonder what God is up to at times. It may test our faith, and stretch us uncomfortably. Yet, as the Queen pointed out in her Easter message, "Easter isn't cancelled."

We have the opportunity to use this period to reflect deeply and honestly on what Easter really means to us, both as individuals and as a church. What is our honest response to the news that Jesus is risen? Our reassurance is that Jesus is present with us even when we are unsure of the answer.

Our Gospel reading concludes by explaining that the accounts are written "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may

have life in his name.” This is a message to persevere, for that word “believe” is not a once-only event, but, as the footnote to this verse makes clear, a continuous act. Keep going, keep wrestling and be patient with yourself and others when you have questions.

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