

Revd. Jon's script for the sermon on the Video for the 3rd Sunday in Easter, April 26th.

John tells us that he has written his Good News account so that we may believe in who Jesus is and that in believing, we may have life in his name – life to the full which we'll explore next week.

One of John's themes throughout his gospel is that of seeing, both physical seeing and metaphorical seeing. Put those two together and we have a neat introduction to the account of Thomas for whom seeing is believing.

If it wasn't for St. John – we would know nothing much about Thomas.

Four of the disciples **Bartholomew, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot** have nothing recorded of what they said or did and Thomas would have been in the same category if John hadn't included him three times in his Gospel.

He comes to our attention in chapter 11 in the early part of the story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus.

Heading back to Judea where Lazarus lived was to go to a place where they had tried to stone Jesus and Thomas thinks Jesus is heading into mortal danger BUT says **"Let us also go, that we may die with him."**

It shows us his courage but also that he takes things in a literal way, a plain way. Lazarus is dead. It's a place where they want Jesus dead. Chances are – We're all going to die!! But – lets go anyway and die with him.

In John 14 Jesus is comforting his disciples...

*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴**You know the way to the place where I am going.**"*

This is where Thomas speaks up and I like that about him. All the others may have been sitting thinking "what's he on about?" but Thomas has the courage and the humility to ask.

Have you ever been in a situation where you haven't a clue what's going on but you don't want to say anything because you don't want to look a fool?

Thomas has no time for that. He's not bothered about his reputation among the others and he doesn't know what Jesus is talking about – so he asks.

What are you talking about? **We don't know where you are going so how can we know the way?** Literal. Practical. Plain speaking.

This brings from Jesus a wonderful answer so I am so grateful Thomas asked his question.

⁶ Jesus answered, **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**

It's not what you know – but who you know that counts!

So – Thomas the plain spoken, humble, straightforward. Keep it simple please. Courageous.

The third story was today's reading. Thomas wants what the others have already had. They have seen Jesus, he hasn't and he can't believe. He can't make that leap of faith. It's just too incredible and too bizarre. For a man who needs things plain and simple he just cannot conceive of a dead man appearing to his friends.

In preparing I came across this sentence by Clayton Schmit.

Faith, is a mystery of the heart that the mind wants to solve.

At this point in the story Thomas' mind cannot grasp what the others are saying or claiming. His mind rules his heart. He may want with all his heart for it to be true...but he just can't get it.

I wonder where you are in this story?

Are you like the disciples whose faith is secure but you know or live with people like Thomas who don't believe?

Or are you where Thomas is. Questions, doubts. You hear what other say and might long to believe but you can't somehow make the leap?

Or I suspect there are a great many in between. You have a faith but also doubts.

We are made in the image of God. He gave us enquiring minds and we are hardwired to seek understanding. He also gave us hearts to respond to his love.

Brother Lawrence (my saint hero) seemed to live permanently in the presence of God, filled with love and peace and joy...he got there by practising the presence of God. However in his early days he was filled with the belief he would be damned...that is sent to hell. He lived with this huge doubt about God's saving grace and love and it lasted four years.

Even as he devoted himself to loving and serving God, he carried this huge anxiety until he realised it was a lack of faith. Like Thomas...he was struggling to believe God would forgive and give him a place in the Father's house.

Elton Trueblood says

"Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservation".

Finally, Brother Lawrence was able to let his faith in a loving God triumph over his doubt. He trusted without reservation a God who gave his Son to be our Saviour. Thomas was invited to see and touch for himself. Wounded hands, wounded side. Thomas was not judged or excluded because of his doubts. Jesus showed him gentle love and grace recognising that he needed to see for himself...blessed are those who believe and haven't seen.

The former Bishop of Durham, the Academic David Jenkins was hugely criticised for remarks he made about the Virgin birth, resurrection and just about everything else. When York Cathedral was hit by lightning it was claimed to be God's judgement on this faithless Bishop.

It was probably a mistake to make him a Bishop, because he was an academic with a deeply enquiring mind – the best place for him was in a University theology department.

I met him on a weekend retreat and as a good evangelical, bible believing Christian wondered what I would make of him. He openly and honestly shared with everyone his doubts, his questions, his struggle to understand things we simply cannot prove or replicate or demonstrate. Resurrection for example. But on the final Sunday service, at Communion, he became quite emotional and with tears running down his face said... "there's so much I don't know but there's this one thing I do know – God loves me".

Each of us, discovering faith or having walked the way of faith for many years face the same challenge, to grow in faith trusting without reservation even in the situation we find ourselves. We place our trust in the one who raised Jesus from the dead, in his unfailing love. Thankfully it's not trusting in who we are – but in who He is.

The words of this next song make a suitable prayer

In my wrestling and in my doubts,
in my failures You won't walk out
Your great love will lead me through,
You are the peace in my troubled sea.

In the silence, You won't let go,
in the questions, Your truth will hold
Your great love will lead me through,
You are the peace in my troubled sea.

My Lighthouse, Shining in the darkness,
I will follow You,
I will trust the promise
You will carry me safe to shore