

Doubt Dispelled

John 20:19-31

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. (Jer 29:13)

We don't know where Thomas spent the first Easter Day. Jesus had said that they would all be scattered to their homes. (16:32) Thomas must have been so crushed he hadn't even sought the company of his friends.

Perhaps they sought him out: ***We have seen the Lord!*** But Thomas, that down-to-earth disciple who believed in plain words, **could not believe** all they told him.

What do we know about Thomas?

When Jesus said he was going to prepare a place for them in his Father's house & that **they knew the way there**, it was Thomas who said, *Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?* (14:5-6) Jesus answered him, ***I am the Way – to the Father – the Way of Truth and Life*** – to the Father whom they'd known and seen in Jesus. They were to believe in him and love him, by keeping his commandments. **Now he was leaving them for a little while** and ***they would be in anguish***. Like a woman whose time had come to give birth – **but this would all be forgotten when he came back to them** – just as a woman forgets when she rejoices in her baby. (16:21)

Jesus had said, ***I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father***. Now that was plain speaking – **now they understood**. *Yes, we believe you came from God. Do you now believe? You will all be scattered and leave me alone.* (16:28-32)

Jesus knew the difference between **head-knowledge**, with good intentions – and real **heart-commitment** and **a changed life** from the presence of God's Spirit within us. I wonder if **we** know this difference?

Whatever else Thomas had **not** understood – he **had** understood this – that **Jesus knew he was about to die**. Thomas had been the

first to voice that for them all. **Then** he'd thought he was **brave enough to die** with Jesus. But they'd all let him down and fled, even though **they'd believed** he was **God's Messiah**.

Now the **pessimism** that had led Thomas to say, *Let us go back to Judea, so that we may die with him (11:16)* – led Thomas to **hold on to the conviction that Jesus was dead and gone**. The most that his friends could have seen was a spirit, a ghost.

Had Thomas good grounds for his pessimistic doubts? Probably most of us would say, Yes, since **dead people do not come back to life**. For many, such a universal experience is sufficient to rule out the **possibility** that Jesus rose again from the dead.

Of course, the tendency of the human heart is to be slow to believe that God intends **blessing and not woe**. What have you been saying about the weather lately? We English, at least, are in the habit of saying, *Good morning!* and following it with *Awful weather isn't it?* – or, if it has been really fine, with *I don't expect it will last!* **We are born pessimists** – and I think Thomas was burdened by his own desertion of Jesus, when they all ran away.

What evidence should have been good enough for Thomas?

1. **He had seen Jesus' deeds.** Those great works of healing and power – but evidently **he did not think this power could be applied to Jesus himself**, if **he** were dead and gone. Was this because **Thomas couldn't see these deeds as signs pointing to who Jesus was?** *Others* might be blessed – but this was *Thomas'* friend and Master. The loss was too bitter – and he was *too unworthy* for such relief to **his** sorrow.
2. **He had heard Jesus' words.** He had agreed with Peter, *You have the words of eternal life – to whom else should we go? (6:68)* Sometimes they **had been** difficult to understand, even harder to obey. But Jesus had called them his friends and told them plainly **he was to suffer and die and be raised the third day**. But they had only taken in the first part and failed to grasp

the literal truth of his promise. Had Thomas forgotten **the authority** – as well as the love – in the words, *I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep...I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again? (10:11-18)*

3. **He had come to know who Jesus was.** To Philip Jesus had said, *Don't you know me, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... Believe me when I say that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. (14:9-11)* And **had he not heard** Jesus say to Martha, **I am the Resurrection and the Life**. *He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. (11:25)* **Could the Lord of Life**, who raised Lazarus from the dead, **remain dead himself?**
4. **He had the testimony of his fellow-disciples.** Can't you imagine the conversation? **Surely you saw Jesus' ghost?** Thomas, we thought that too, but he showed us his wounds. He said, *Touch me and see, a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones, as you see I have. (Luke 24:39-43)* **Well, I shan't believe it was more than a dream, unless I see and handle him for myself.** Thomas, he asked for food and ate some of our supper while we watched! That couldn't happen because of a dream! Besides, when we went to the tomb, *the body was gone!*

Perhaps you mistook the place? No, Thomas, we didn't – besides, *his graveclothes* were left behind. Go and see for yourself, by all means. **And the women would add**, The angels we saw said, *Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, he has risen! (Luke 24:5-6)* **How can we be sad any longer**, now we have seen him for ourselves, each one of us?

Don't you remember his words to us? He explained what we had never understood before! Thomas, Jesus **had** to die!

Jesus had to die? It was his Father's will. It was the **only** way God could forgive our sins. Don't you remember John the Baptist's words? He said Jesus was the **Lamb of God**, who would take away the sin of the world. (*John 1:29*) Thomas, Jesus told us he fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, *He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.* (*Isa 53:5-6*)

Thomas' thinking

With much testimony of this kind Thomas' friends **must** have tried to convince him of the source of their new-found joy and assurance. **But**, despite their prayers, **he could not share it**. I think he had a very uncomfortable week. **All his friends had become strangers to him**. Have you had his experience? At heart he was torn between **envy** of their happiness and fellowship together – and **irritation** at their simple-minded credulity.

How **could** they believe anything **so contrary to all human experience?** But there was no denying **something** had happened. Well, **he** wouldn't give in to wild fancies so readily – he wanted **real proof** for himself. He must first put his finger in the nail-holes, and his hand in the spear-wound in Jesus' side. **Then he would believe, but not before.**

Perhaps you think Thomas was privileged. **We haven't** seen or heard Jesus in the flesh, or seen those miracles. But **we still have** the disciples' testimony – and Jesus' words. And we **can** still see today lives that Jesus has changed - & know the effect this has had down 2000 years of history. And we **can still** experience Jesus' power in **our own lives** – if we will let him!

No doubt, **Thomas pondered** his friends' words. **If**, as they asserted so strongly, Jesus **had** risen bodily from the dead – **what could it mean?** This wasn't like the raising of Lazarus – Jesus was in some way different. **As if he'd overcome death for ever**, and all

the restrictions of this life. He'd appeared suddenly in their midst, behind locked doors – and disappeared as readily. **Surely he was victorious over death**, over the worst his enemies could do to him.

WHO, then, was Jesus? Perhaps he pondered Jesus' words – and the words of Scripture. Jesus had said, ***I am the good shepherd...the LORD is my shepherd.*** (*10:11; Psa 23:1*) ***I am the light of the world...the LORD is my light and my salvation.*** (*8:12; Psa 27:1*) ***I am the Way, the Truth and the Life...Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth.*** (*14:6; Psa 86:11*) ***Before Abraham was born, I am.*** (*8:58*)

Thomas' conviction and ours

Then, on that second Sunday evening, it happened. *Peace be with you!* **Thomas, put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe!**

So Jesus had known what I, Thomas, thought and said. *I* who had doubted my friends, *had doubted Jesus himself.* **My Lord and my God!** *Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.* (*20:29*)

And with that, **our Lord's last beatitude**, he would welcome **us** – you and me, also! For **Jesus wants each of us to come right through to full faith and genuine commitment.**

Is Jesus, for you, still among the dead? Oh yes, you have heard from *others* that he lives. You have seen *their* joy and assurance – **but you do not have them yourself** – you, yourself, have not heard the voice of Jesus.

Perhaps, like Thomas, **you have genuine perplexities and intellectual problems.** Well, Jesus *knows* about them, *just as he knew Thomas's doubts.* But suppose I were to **clear up all** your difficulties – would that bring **you** any nearer to **knowing Jesus for yourself?** If you have difficulties in believing – **tell Jesus yourself** – but, unlike Thomas, **set no conditions** on how he is to answer them for **you.**

But **this** promise I can give you. When folk were divided on whether Jesus came from God, he said, ***If anyone chooses to do God's will – he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.*** (John 7:17) That promise is still true today. Any **genuine doubter** can put it to the test. For God has promised: *You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.* (Jer 29:13)

Making our way to God

But perhaps **your difficulty** is different. Like Thomas and his friends, you *have* heard the Lord – but **you know that you are not fit to come into his presence.** Like Peter, you say, *Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!* (Luke 5:8) **Are you then** still trying to make **your own way to God?** Jesus said, ***No-one comes to the Father except through me.*** (John 14:6) You cannot **earn** heaven, you can only accept **with open, empty hands**, what Jesus has purchased for you! Let him show **you** his wounds – he received them for **you!** Have you thanked him for that? Have you let him speak the words, ***Peace be with you,*** to your own heart?

Many here will have done that. You **have** asked Jesus to be your **Saviour**, your Sin-bearer. But there is **another confession** that must go along with that. Perhaps that week of soul-searching helped Thomas ***to see further than his friends,*** for his confession, when it came, went further than any other. ***My Lord and my God.***

Have **you** said those words to Jesus, and **really meant** them? Is Jesus ***everything*** to you and me? He **cannot share** the throne in our lives with anyone or anything else. **Either** he is truly on the throne in our lives – **or we are!** Remember: *Christ died and returned to life so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living!* (Rom 14:9) Is he not worthy of our utmost love and obedience?

This Easter story speaks to us in another way, too. ***Jesus is alive!*** ***We may know and trust him every day!*** ***We may know him as a present help, a present reality!*** ***And he gives us a mighty hope for our future.***

I am conscious that **there may be those here who grieve**, or who face the death of one they love, **or who are themselves afraid of dying.** We all need to remember that Jesus was raised from the dead to be *the first-fruits of a great harvest*, of all of us who put our trust in him. (1 Cor 15:23) ***My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*** (John 6:40)

May each of us believe and trust Jesus, as Thomas did. It is almost certain that he took the good news further than any other of Jesus's disciples, because he went as far as south India. May the Lord give us courage to be his witness too!

Amen.