

***May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be now and always acceptable unto You O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.***

It's a bit of an eclectic theme today, we are using the Patronal Festival of St Thomas as both a celebration of this church building, and an opportunity to thank our volunteers who do so much to mow lawns, clean, polish, play music and in a thousand other ways serve the purpose and the glory of God in this place. We have in the past gathered our volunteers at a single service at St Mary's but it seems to me more appropriate that we invite you to attend a service at the place you serve so diligently. Please know that we are very grateful for your service, and we are hoping that you will continue to serve well into the future. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

In a shortened version of our Ephesians reading this morning we might say

*You are no longer slaves and aliens ...  
but citizens with the saints ...  
members of the household of God ...  
with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone,  
in Him the whole structure is joined  
together and grows into a Holy  
Temple in the Lord.*

On a lighter note, I am much less concerned than you might believe with the fact that I don't see some of you very often on Sundays ... there are many ways we each serve our God ... all of them are valuable in His eyes and He leaves us free to make our own decisions about what we do. Don't get me wrong, we would love to see you more often, especially if there are matters we can help you with, but that is between you and Jesus! In the meantime, please know that we appreciate you and your labour, and that you are always welcome here. Bless you. I look forward to sharing a cup of tea with you after the service.

Our Patron Saint is St Thomas; Didymus (the twin), sometimes unfortunately called "doubting Thomas." While not too much is known about him, he is credited with making one of the more exotic post resurrection journeys of them all. It's thought that he went first to India and then onto China before going back later to India where he died (and for whom he is also the Patron Saint). But he is also highly venerated in Ethiopia and South America, especially Paraguay, where the native people are convinced that a man bearing his credentials preached to them and performed wondrous signs and miracles. I guess once he was on the Silk Route or the Spice Route anything was possible. Whatever the truth of it, we recognise Thomas as one of Jesus' apostles that seems to have taken the Great Commission very seriously in the immediate aftermath of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

But what about Thomas and the "doubting" thing ... where he missed out on seeing the risen Jesus on the evening of that first day and had to wait a week before making the strongest affirmation of Jesus' new status that we can find anywhere in the NT. It seems to me that there are a few myths about this episode that don't necessarily help our understanding. We should be very careful about how we attend to the text; to discovering what is there, as opposed to what we invent by making assumptions.

First of all, does this passage tell us more about Thomas, or more about Jesus? Secondly, is Thomas *doubting* Jesus, or is he *angry* at having missed out on seeing *his Lord and his God*?

Matthew shortens the story to say that "*When they saw Him they worshipped Him*

*but some doubted.*" Mark goes further and says that Jesus *"upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen."* Luke doesn't talk about *doubt* at all; he is more concerned about the two men who meet Jesus on the Road to Emmaus. He says that the disciples all thought Jesus *was a ghost* and that He asked for something to eat.

John says that the first thing that Jesus did after passing through a solid, locked door was stand among His disciples and say; *"Peace be with you."* In other words; *"don't be afraid, be calm, be confident in yourself, be confident in Me and all the things we have done together ... everything's fine!"* Whatever their state of mind beforehand (remember they were behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish leaders) they had heard from Mary and Peter that morning, but it's highly unlikely that they were able to make sense of such a massive shift in momentum by themselves. So Jesus arrives and says *Peace be with you*. But Thomas isn't there. Whatever he'd been doing, Thomas misses out ... no wonder he might have been angry. Was he shopping for dinner? Was he quietly praying somewhere, or planning to run away? Was he simply visiting his mother or his wife? We just don't know. Does it matter? Does *doubt* in itself really undermine the way of Jesus to any serious extent?

We do know from this text that Jesus had a whole new physical reality ... he could pass through a solid locked door and eat a piece of fish. He could still speak and be heard and touched ... so the ghost story lacks any credibility. We know that Jesus recognised, and was recognised by His disciples, and that He was still able to function in a rational and intuitive manner ... and to empathise with Thomas in his emotional distress. We also know that Jesus had a new ability to use the moment to look into the future and care for, speak to all those of us *"who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*

John makes a number of important connections about Jesus by the details he recalls. In contrast to Luke, who talks about Jesus showing His disciples His hands *and His feet*, John says that Jesus revealed His hands *and His side*. In doing so, he makes a connection between the blood and water which flowed from the hole pierced in Jesus' side when He was still on the cross, and the fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy (chapters 47-48) from his vision of the new Temple ... when water *"flowed from its threshold."* John ensures that we can't miss this connection between Christ's body and this new Temple.

So, while we don't discover much new about Thomas, except that he appears to be a normal emotional human when under immense stress, we do learn a lot about the new nature of Jesus and how He enables both the disciples of His time, *and us today*, to make the important transition from just living our physical human lives, to becoming instead, very members incorporate of the mystical body of Christ: His hands and His feet in the world in every age.

Be in no doubt, Jesus leaves us with a job to do and He leaves us with the wherewithal to get it done. I like the words of the prophet Habakkuk this morning:

*I will stand at my watch-post ...  
station myself on the ramparts ...  
to see what he will say to me ...  
there is still a vision for [every?]  
appointed time ... if it seems to tarry,  
wait for it.*

Thomas was ready to wait and to make that transition ... are we?

**Amen.**