

Sermon Sunday 11 April 2021 - Doubt

So that's it, Easter is over. Christ is crucified. Christ is risen. The Spirit of God is with us. Alleluia!

I'm never sorry to leave Easter behind and move on. I don't really enjoy the ingredients of Good Friday - it's a grim tale of betrayal, deceit, injustice, torture and a painful, prolonged death upon the cross. I understand that there has to be this suffering for Jesus' sacrifice to be meaningful and it does, of course, make Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday all the more joyful. But at the time, it's doesn't make for uplifting reading.

What follows is much more exciting, because we enter an exhilarating phase in the evolution of the Christian story, where the spirit of the Lord, the resurrected Christ, starts to appear to his believers in different circumstances. He starts to enter the lives of people like you and me... as he has continued to do for over 2,000 years.

In the gospels, there are ten occurrences of Christ appearing to his believers after the crucifixion. There's Easter morning, of course. There's the road to Emmaus where two followers meet a stranger and only realise later that it is the risen Christ. There is the occasion on shore of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus cooks breakfast for some of the Disciples and reprieves Peter from the anguish of his denial. And then there's the mysterious appearance in the locked room, where the Disciples are hiding in fear of the Jewish Authorities. They are all there, apart from Thomas.

This is one of my favourite gospel passages. If, in another life, I'd been one of Christ's Disciples, I would have been like Thomas.

Have you ever missed a big event and had your friends say 'Oh, man, you should have been there! The light show was fantastic! The second goal was strike of the season! There were over half a million people there, it's a shame you couldn't make it!' When that happens, you feel deflated.

I don't blame Thomas for being a bit sulky for missing the party. If I'd been him, I would have reacted the same way. 'Look, it's not that I don't believe you, Peter, James and John but unless I see the wounds of Jesus, I'm not convinced it was him. Ok? I'm just saying, y' know?'

In fact, I wouldn't mind betting that most of us would have been like Thomas, because I'm sure we all have a tendency for feeling doubtful about different things at different times in our lives. We all have a tendency to be a doubting Thomas occasionally.

Doubt is very close to fear and worry. And it's a brave person who says that they don't occasionally wake up at 2.00 o'clock in the morning worrying about something. I've always thought that I was a laid-back person but I can't say that I have never had doubts. We all have them: worries about what subjects we choose to study, where we live, our friendships, our relationships, our careers, money, politics, the environment, health: even, or particularly, our faith sometimes causes us to have doubts.

But when we do feel like that, we can all take courage from the Thomas experience... because Christ comes back a week later and pays special attention to Thomas, putting his mind at rest. He says: *Put your hand here, feel my wounds*. He's not angry with Thomas for having doubts. On the contrary, he comforts him and gives him peace. And Thomas shows a depth of feeling that the other Disciples don't. Thomas is the only one who is recorded as saying: *My Lord and my God*. His belief returns and is stronger for going through the painful experience of doubt.

It's not wrong to feel fear or doubt or uncertainty or to ask questions. What we need to do when that happens, however, is remember to take whatever troubles us to God, pray to the risen Christ about it, and he will reassure you... maybe not immediately; like Thomas, you may have to wait a week, or even longer (you can never predict God's timetable) but you can have confidence that, if you turn to God, things will work out alright according to his will and you'll feel different because of your prayers.

Out of doubt comes, not just strength, but rescue and restoration. Christ wants us to explore our faith. When our questions are answered we can feel the reality of Christ saying: 'Peace be with you'

I leave that thought with you and I'd like to finish with a poem by American Father Jim Schmitmeyer. For this I must pay tribute to the Very Reverend Christine Wilson, Dean of Lincoln Cathedral, for highlighting this poem and for her thoughts on Thomas that inspired me.

Ask anyone who's ever shoved aside the rock of life

And uncovered the light of God...
They'll tell you a story...
About the power of hope, the power of faith, the power of love.
A story about transformation...
A story about what it's like to die of suburban boredom,
Or bodily addiction or emotional dismay...
Only to be born again, be new again, live life again.
A resurrected life,
An eternal, never-ending life.
All because of Christ.
Hear their stories
And think of your own.
The event that changed you.
The influence that formed you.
The sacraments that save you.
Because, somehow, somehow,
You too have brushed up against Christ
And, somehow, learned the truth about God.
Somehow, some way,
Christ has called your name.
You've seen his face.
You've heard his voice.
You've touched his scars.

Amen