



**Icon: *The touching of Thomas***

**Easter II: "It's True"**

**Readings:** Psalm 16 1 Peter 1: 3-9 John 20: 19-31 Acts 2:14a, 22-32

As the Gospel reading indicates, the Apostle Thomas was not present when the risen Jesus first appeared to the disciples. When the others told him: "We have seen the Lord," Thomas replied that he would not believe it unless he could actually touch Jesus' wounds. When he later appeared to the apostles Jesus invited Thomas to inspect his wounds.

Although it is not used in the Bible, the nickname "Doubting Thomas" was given to Thomas because of his disbelief about the resurrection. People who are sceptical are sometimes called "Doubting Thomas."

Thomas is recorded as saying those words that have passed into common usage: "Unless I see .... I will not believe.."

It seems unfair to me that Thomas has been labelled as the doubting one. I think he gets a "bad rap" and "a bad rep": It is only a week since the events of Easter unfolded, including Mark and Luke's accounts of how the apostles did not believe the witnesses who saw the angels at the tomb, but those disciples have not been labelled as "Doubters".

Perhaps that has something to do with the fact that the witnesses in that case were women [Mary Magdalene, [Joanna] and Mary the mother of James]...

We first met Thomas in John's Gospel back in Ch 11:16 when Jesus was planning to go to Judea to raise Lazarus, and the disciples were trying to talk him out of it, because it was dangerous territory for Jesus. Thomas makes his first forthright appearance in this Gospel when he says: "Let us also go, that we may die with him." He seems brave in a resigned sort of way.

He next appeared in Ch 14:1, when Jesus was talking about his impending death and ascension to heaven. It's unlikely that any of disciples really understood what Jesus was saying (this is suggested by Jesus' seemingly exasperated interaction with Philip in verse 9); but it was left to Thomas to say what everyone is thinking but no one else is brave enough to voice: He speaks up and if we were to put it in contemporary colloquial speak (v 5) he says something like "Well, actually, I have no clue what you're on about".

It's fair to say that Thomas seems like a straight talker, with an enquiring mind. He is willing to ask the tough questions that others may be too afraid or embarrassed to ask.

Although he lived at the time of Christ, his approach seems remarkably contemporary: He apparently believes in data-driven conclusions. In that, he is just like many of us because so do we, and so does our society. He wants hard empirical evidence that Jesus is risen.

Thomas speaks to our values perhaps more than we recognise: Witness the way that people's behaviour seems to have changed as the "hard evidence" has emerged of just how dangerous the virus can be.

Are we perhaps like Thomas, and if so, in what ways?

In some quarters abstract arguments about the "existence" of God as a philosophical concept still seethe. Since we all reading

this and would probably be in church under other circumstances, it is probably safe to assume that for the most part, we have satisfactorily answered in the affirmative that question: “Is God real?”

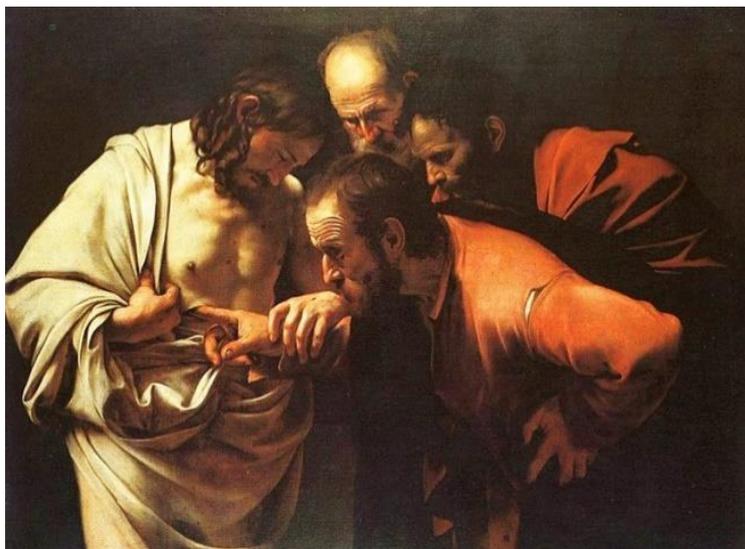
However, that’s not to say that we don’t still have questions and uncertainties, perhaps about particular aspects of the faith the Church affirms or about some of its practices.

However, I suspect that what concentrates our hearts and minds are questions about the nature of God. These deeper concerns are ones that sound down the ages and echo from the Scriptures, particularly books like the Psalms and Job. In the current context they probably consume people’s thoughts more than at other times too: Where is God in the midst of the human condition, fraught as it so often is? Is God present in our suffering? Is God with us in the midst of pain, injustice, and uncertainty? ===

In a sense, that’s what Thomas was asking: “Where is God now?” Perhaps not unlike our present situation, the context of that now was frightening, dark and confusing: Jesus has been crucified, and the disciples were cowering behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. When his fellow disciples tell him that they have seen the risen Jesus, their eyewitness account is not enough for Thomas:

“Unless I see .... I will not believe...”

It is encouraging to note that Jesus does not scold Thomas for his uncertainty, his desire for evidence, but invites Thomas to verify the facts for himself. It is also intriguing to notice that Scripture doesn’t tell us whether Thomas actually did put his fingers into the wounds in Jesus’ hands, or put his hand into the gash in his side as Caravaggio depicts so graphically in *The Incredulity of Thomas*:



There is a sense in which Thomas highlights a deep yearning for God's presence in our world, a yearning as old as humanity itself, which only serves to heighten the unfairness of that title: "Doubting". Like Thomas, many people in our "secular age" want "data" or indications of Christ's presence in the world as we know it.

As if in response to that yearning, in Thomas, we also see the pattern of Christian discipleship established from the beginning of John's Gospel. One person encounters Jesus. Then they share their experience with the next person, who may express some reluctance. Then Jesus seeks out that person who experiences Jesus for himself or herself, is convinced about him and then shares the news with the next person. Andrew tells Peter. Philip tells Nathanael. The Samaritan woman tells the townspeople and so on and so on down the ages to us in our day and our world.

Jesus' words to Thomas are for us: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." So what is it that leads us to believe, confirms us in our faith and holds us there despite our questions and uncertainties?

It is experiences of God, encounters with the risen Jesus in nature, in the church, in other people; our own experiences and those of others. It's that empirical evidence that Thomas sought.

We may not have the risen Christ with us in a way that we can touch, but we can touch signs of resurrection all around us in the church and beyond if we have eyes to see.

Perhaps that is the most relevant thing to take away in our current, strange world, a prayer for open eyes and hearts that we may be able to see God's presence everywhere around and in us, so that we, like Thomas, can respond: "My Lord and my God", and be comforted and reassured. **Amen**

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