

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2023; Easter 2. Holy Communion  
Stonegrave, Gilling

Thomas

I wonder how many times you have missed out on something extraordinary. One of those memorable moments, when your friends said - “Oh you just missed it” or “you should have been there.”

In our Gospel today we find Thomas is the man who misses out on an extraordinary encounter with the risen Christ, because he was somewhere else. As the community experiences the event, he is the one who misses it.

Although he was a man of great conviction and faith, who would only believe if he saw himself, and because of that, he has become known as the ‘doubter’. We often judge people by one mistake. This is what has happened to Thomas. Today when someone is sceptical, we call that person a ‘doubting Thomas.’ Yet, the reality is, Thomas was one of the most steadfast and loyal apostles among the Twelve. History has misjudged him, yet how many times have wrongly judged someone!

In fact, if we were to be honest with ourselves, we would probably have reacted the same way as Thomas because generally, our rational minds want evidence to get to the truth rather than just rely on the claims of others. Yet when he is finally confronted with the Risen Jesus, Thomas the doubter moves from disbelief to the proclamation: “My Lord and my God!” In confessing those words, he looks at Jesus of Nazareth and address him with the word, ‘God’.

Here, John in his Gospel has moved from the opening words, ‘in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God’ to now this muddled, dogged disciple determined not to be taken in, not to believe until he has seen for himself, is confronted by Jesus smiling at him. Thomas’s response

was immediate, he fell at Jesus's feet and exclaimed with passionate tears of joy, "My Lord and my God!" His doubts instantly vanished in the presence of the living Christ like morning mist in sunlight. Thomas has given this assurance to the world. His confession was noble—the most advanced, in fact, made by any of the Twelve during the time they were with Jesus. The greatest doubter attained the fullest and firmest belief. Thomas's faith became strong and vibrant. Tradition has it that he took the gospel to India. Like the other apostles, missionaries and martyrs ever since, he did not do that if he knew it was all for a dream. He would not have been loyal just to a figment of his imagination. Thomas met with the Risen Christ, emerged victorious and became faithful unto death in his witness for God.

What can we learn from him? Initially, he made an error; he withdrew from the fellowship; he sought loneliness rather than togetherness and missed meeting Jesus with his brothers and sisters. We too miss a great deal when we separate ourselves from Christian fellowship and try to go it alone. Things happen to us within the fellowship of our church which won't happen if we are alone. Often, when sorrow or sadness come, we tend to shut ourselves away and refuse to be with people but that is when we need each other the most. Thomas's life was transformed when he was with the church in the company of Jesus, so can ours.

Secondly, what transforms our doubts? Jesus did not condemn Thomas for his doubts. Jesus knew that once Thomas fought his way through the wilderness of his doubts, he would be the surest man in Christendom. So, Jesus never says, "You must have no doubts," but rather, "You must struggle with your doubts until you reach certainty." Do you have doubts? Yes, I do. So, keep faith and keep doing the best you know right where you are. Stay faithful, keep trusting, following, serving, praying. God will reveal himself. He will show you the nail prints.

Finally, what convinces us? What is it that makes faith believable? In us do others see something worth believing and following. Unlike Thomas we may not be called to mission across the world, but we can manifest the little miracles of transformation as witnesses to the love and light shining through our lives as Christ's followers? We can have that same courage and faith, that same outpouring of grace and blessing that can ignite hope and cause us to embody love in action. It may be the work in food banks, as street pastors or volunteers at night shelters, or the visiting the sick or the lonely, the showing compassion to the needy, or finding time to say a quiet prayer for another.

Whatever we do, we will echo in our lives those transforming words of 'doubting Thomas', 'My Lord and my God, and we will be living signs of the Resurrection and the transformed life it brings.

Alleluia, He is Risen. Amen.