

Doubting with Thomas – Easter 2

Acts 2:14a 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:1-12; John 20:19-31

Jesus' disciples were and are a diverse lot. Just as we can learn from one another's journeys of discipleship, so we can also learn from the joys and struggles of those early disciples.

Thomas is an interesting man. He is sometimes referred to, although not in the scriptures, as "doubting Thomas" as if this were his main characteristic. Like many beliefs that grow up around scripture rather than from scripture, nothing could be further from the truth.

The gospels tell us quite a lot about Thomas's personal qualities.

Thomas was courageous and prepared to be faithful unto death. When Lazarus was deathly sick and Jesus said, "Let's go back to Judea" (where Lazarus was), the other disciples murmured that this was a place of danger where there had been previous attempts on Jesus' life. When Jesus eventually told the disciples that Lazarus had died but that he (Jesus) had an intentional purpose in going to him, it was Thomas who said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." He trusted and was prepared to follow Jesus, even to the point of death.

Thomas was also a man with an inquiring intellect. He did not speak or act as impulsively as some of the other disciples. He sought to understand clearly what was happening.

Before his death, Jesus said to his disciples, *If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.* (John 14.3-4)

Thomas is the one who asks, *Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?* (John 14.5)

Jesus answered, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.* (John 14. 6-7)

This answer, clearly identifying Jesus with the Father, is one that will eventually find a powerful response from Thomas when he meets Jesus after the resurrection.

In the disciples' time of sorrow after the crucifixion, Thomas was not with the other gathered disciples when Jesus first appeared to them. Why was that? We don't know where he was, but he was not in that house with, in John's words, the doors locked for fear of the Jews. He was out in the world, not hiding away.

The other disciples told Thomas that they had seen Jesus alive. This was incredible news. Can we blame Thomas for thinking, *Can this be true? I really need to see this for myself.*

I think that for far more trivial things, like *It's snowing!* or *You got an A for that assignment.*

Thomas is basically saying, *Don't just tell me. Show me.* And Jesus does not rebuke Thomas for this.

A week later Jesus appears again to the disciples, this time appearing to Thomas as well. And he invites Thomas to *see, touch, feel . . .* and only then does he say, *Stop doubting and believe.*

Jesus also answers us as he has answered Thomas. We are invited not just to hear about Jesus but to experience Jesus – to reach out to him and be reassured of his love and of his enduring reality.

Thomas had a willingness to trust and follow Jesus spiritually as well as physically.

When Jesus appears to Thomas and the others in that locked room, Thomas finds that he does not, after all, need to touch and feel. Metaphorically he is brought to his knees by the realization of Jesus' resurrection. He responds *My Lord and my God.*

This is a huge step beyond the recorded responses of the other disciples and takes us back to Jesus statement, *If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.*

Here Thomas does indeed identify Jesus with the Father, Not just *my Lord*, but *my Lord and my God*. This is a huge leap of faith from a man who now has no doubts. He has made all the connections. Thomas's doubts have been satisfied.

I don't know about you, but I live my life with doubts about all sorts of things. I have no problem with doubts. My doubts are my basic quality control system. If I am not sure about something, I check it out.

Having doubt is not like listening to someone and thinking, *No I don't think that sounds right* and then not thinking any further. Doubts are something to be resolved one way or another.

If someone says, this wonky-looking plank bridge is safe to use to cross the stream, I may well believe them but I'll take a look at those planks before I trust my life to them, not least because I can't swim. That's my doubt-driven quality control system. I don't need an engineer's report, but I may take a look at who else has been using the bridge and how it's basically constructed before I step out with confidence. That's how my physical and spiritual radar works. Yours may work a little differently.

How did Thomas resolve his doubts? Jesus said to him, *Because you have seen me, you have believed*. Seeing Jesus, exactly what the other disciples experienced, was what brought Thomas to that powerful response of faith.

Then we hear, *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*. That is not about Thomas or the other eleven. They all saw Jesus. There were and are many, many other disciples who did not see Jesus and yet believed. Including us. *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*. We are blessed. Isn't that wonderful! Jesus did not say, don't question, don't think, don't have (and process) those doubts. But when you reach that point of belief, whether it is

spectacularly quick like Paul on the road to Damascus, or more slowly like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, you are truly blessed.

You may not need to do a lot to reach that point. But plenty of other people are like Thomas and do need to check it all out. So how do they go about that? There are many different ways.

It can be a bit like checking out that old rugged plank bridge. Who has gone before? How was it for them? And how does it all work?

You may choose to meditate upon the Word. John, in his gospel, offers this encouragement. *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* (John 20. 30-31)

Life in his name. That is a wonderful promise, especially in this Easter season.

You may also turn to prayer, worship and other spiritual practices, or simply open your heart and your life to a personal experience of Jesus. Psalm 34 says, *Taste and see that the Lord is good.* (Ps 34.8)

While we have talked about Thomas, his courage, his trust, his faithfulness, his enquiring mind, and how he came to acknowledge Jesus as his Lord and God, in more abstract terms we have also looked at the nature of doubt and the acquisition of faith.

Individuals paths to faith may vary. However, there is no better path than that of Thomas – to meet with Jesus and to acknowledge him as our Lord and our God.

May we each meet with Jesus daily and be transformed as we journey in his company and find our life in him.