

Easter 2 John 20:19-31

“When I see the mark of the nails on his hands and on his body, then I’ll believe – only then will I be convinced – only then will I **know!**”

Thomas is my kind of person.

It’s healthy to doubt; to be sceptical; to ask questions; to find out how things really are! I wouldn’t call him **doubting** Thomas! I’d call him **courageous** Thomas!

Let me take you back to where these disciples were, at the time of our Gospel reading this morning, seeing as best we can through the eyes of John. Our gospel reading starts on the first Easter day and ends on the following Sunday, just as we’ve heard it on this first Sunday of Easter.

It’s only ten days ago since they made their preparations and they climbed the steps in their ones and twos to that upper room for their meal together with Jesus. They had no idea then that it was going to be their last supper with him.

During that supper, Jesus had told them that one of them would betray Him, and shortly after this, Judas had left. Only Peter and John – the disciple who Jesus loved - had any idea why.

After supper, they followed Jesus into the garden of Gethsemane.

It was there that **they** came – a band of soldiers with lanterns, torches and weapons – looking for Jesus of Nazareth. And who was there to point him out! Judas! Peter tried to stop them. “Put your sword away, Peter”, Jesus told him so they bound Jesus and took him away. The disciples had been let off, for the time being. They simply melted away into the night.

John tells us that only Peter tried to find out what was happening to Jesus during that long night through into the early hours. And during those dreadful events of Friday, only the women and John are mentioned at the foot of the cross.

Joseph of Arimathea, who was secretly a disciple of Jesus, found the courage to ask Pilate for the body, so that it could be laid to rest before the start of the Sabbath. Together with Nicodemus he prepared the body as well as time would allow and placed it in a tomb nearby.

Then last Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene ran to Peter and John, and gasped out the astounding news, that she'd been to the tomb, and it was empty. "Where have they taken him?" What was this woman talking about? Peter and John raced to the tomb, to find out for themselves. And there before them was the evidence of their eyes.

The stone rolled away.

The linen body covering scattered about.

The napkin rolled up to one side.

No body! Nothing!

They went back and joined the other disciples.

These were a sad and disconsolate bunch. After all they had been through with Jesus. Now it was over. If they could do this to Jesus, what might they do to his disciples? And now they'd even hidden the body.

Then she was back again. Mary.

"I've seen the Lord," she said.

She told them what had happened in the garden.

Peter and John went back there again.

Nothing!

And so we come to the events in this morning's gospel reading.

After everything that had taken place, is it any wonder that the disciples locked themselves safely away, "for fear of the Jews" as John writes?

That's what fear does to you. And the trouble with a locked door is that you are not just keeping people out, you're isolating yourself! You're afraid to go outside – outside in the streets where people are celebrating the Passover. All Jerusalem is celebrating. But not the disciples!

Then, as we've just heard, Jesus showed himself to them with the familiar greeting, "Shalom. Peace be with you."

Following Luke's account of events, the season of Easter lasts for fifty days, until the day of Pentecost. But here, John pressed the fast-forward button, straight on to Pentecost, when in this Gospel Jesus breathed on the frightened and confused disciples, with the words, "Receive the Holy Spirit." He gave them there and then their apostolic commission. "Look. Just as my Father sent me, I'm sending you."

But Thomas wasn't there. Thomas hadn't locked himself away with them. Then Thomas came back.

"We've seen the Lord," they told him.

In today's parlance, Thomas may well have said, "Are you winding me up?" I'll believe that when I see it for myself!

On the next Sunday, just like this morning, on this second Sunday of Easter, Jesus came and showed himself to Thomas. "See for yourself, Thomas! Have faith! No more scepticism! No more doubts!"

Thomas's reply has been the faith of the Church ever since.

"My Lord and my God!"

That is why I think that Thomas was courageous.

Peter Graystone, writing in a reflection for today's Gospel, reminds us that;

"We live in a sceptical age. Seeing is believing. The story of Thomas reaching out to touch Jesus appeals to us because we understand why he asked for proof.

But the experience of millions of Christians is that believing leads to seeing. When you live from day to day assuming there is a good and loving God, changes take place. You are acutely aware of a purpose in life. You become a better person because you start living for the benefit of others. Things will make sense that previously didn't.

Jesus made it clear to Thomas that proof is a privilege and not a right...

But because this story has been preserved, Thomas can come forward 2000 years to us with the message: "There is a Saviour. He is risen and he is alive. If that belief forms the basis of your life, you will discover a fuller, more secure, more meaningful way of being. That will turn out to be more compelling than proof. Reach out your hand. I did."

Amen.