

Sermon for 19th April, 2020 – Doubting Thomas

One of the joys of spending time in the Holy Land, especially in and around the city of Jerusalem, is that when you read passages from the Bible you think “that’s just round the corner from here,” or “I was there yesterday,” or “I know what that looks like.” It puts you into the very presence of the text and brings it alive in a very physical and geographical way.

I felt a bit like that when reading about the disciples in today’s Gospel being in “lockdown” – not for fear of infection in their case, but for fear of reprisals as followers of the recently executed Jesus.

It suddenly made this passage speak to me in the very life that we are leading some two thousand years later. Afraid, uncertain, unsure of the future, worried about health or what will happen if they go outside, trying to catch up on news, needing to keep each other’s spirits up.

And how interesting to note that Thomas was not with them – presumably out doing his daily exercise or trying to find a bag of flour in Waitrose. Good luck with that, Thomas.

And how interesting also to note that when Jesus comes and stands among them, that in wishing them peace to bring about a sense of calm perspective, he doesn’t touch them. No shaking hands here, either, much less an embrace. They keep their distance, strictly six feet apart, reminiscent of the instruction to Mary Magdalene in John’s account of the Resurrection a few verses before today’s Gospel reading (John 20:17) - “Do not hold onto me.”


Touch is so fundamental to our interaction as human beings that we are diminished by its absence, forbidden to shake hands, to offer physical help and support, even encouraged to cross the road when someone crosses our path, despite friendly greetings. For those who live alone, touch is even more precious, perhaps experienced only when sharing the peace at church or in the intimacy of receiving Holy Communion. To be denied this experience of touch is hardship indeed.

Thomas felt this, too. It is not just that he wasn’t there when the others saw the risen Jesus and were reassured by his presence among them. He is left untouched, bereft of contact with his Lord. So Jesus makes a special effort to come back again and repeat the experience just for him, so he can touch and be one with Christ once again.

None of us is sharing in Holy Communion at the moment. The experience of the physical presence of Christ among us is missing in our lives, and, like Thomas, we long for that experience once again. But until such time as it is restored, we shall have to be reassured by the words of the Prayer Book that a spiritual communion is possible through our belief in the Easter season of the redemptive power of the Sacrifice on the Cross and the triumph of Love over Death.

Thomas finds belief through touch. In these times when we cannot touch Jesus through the sacraments of consecrated bread and wine, we can find touch through belief.

Peace be with you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "St. Paul".

“If he do truly repent him of his sins, and steadfastly believe that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed his Blood for his redemption ... he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul’s health, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth.”

Book of Common Prayer, Communion of the Sick