

## John 20 v.19-29

One of my favourite passages in John is where Jesus appears to the disciples despite the locked doors, and they can see the wounds in his hands and his side. And he says, "Peace be with you". And they believe.

But one disciple was missing. Thomas wasn't there when Jesus came back. Thomas arrives and all the other disciples tell him, 'Jesus was just here!' And he doesn't believe them. Thomas tells them, "Unless I see it for myself, and can touch his wounds, I won't believe."

Have you ever wondered how Thomas must have felt right then? The next week, the disciples are together again. This time, Thomas is with them, and he still hasn't seen Jesus. And all of a sudden the same thing happens. Jesus appears. He tells Thomas to put his hands on his and feel the wounds from the nails. And Thomas does. And he believes.

Jesus asks him, "Do you believe because you have seen me?" And then Jesus says, "Blessed are those who do not see yet believe."

I've always felt bad for Thomas. He was asked to do what the other disciples didn't have to do. He had to believe without seeing. Probably any of the others would have had the same struggle. And yet, we all know Thomas as "doubting Thomas". I wonder, how long after this happened did it take for the other disciples to call him that?

I'd hate to be remembered only my greatest moment of doubt. Because I've had them. And I think a lot of us could say the same. But as much as Thomas sort of gets this label as the disciple who didn't believe, he's always been my favourite. Because of all of them he's the one I think most of us can relate to. Because most of us understand what it is to live between faith and doubt.

We think of faith and doubt as opposites. But that's not really true. Faith and apathy are more opposite than faith and doubt. But doubt is often a key part of the journey of faith. It's a stop along the way that most of us make more than once. And when we find ourselves there, it's a sign that we are taking our relationship with

God seriously enough that we are letting ourselves be honest, and we are letting ourselves start a journey without being exactly sure where we are going.

Thomas isn't just the one who doubted, he is also the one who believed, and who helped others to do so as well.

We all doubt - all of us who see faith as a journey. Our faith gets shaken and we question it. We may even feel a bit ashamed of our doubt.

I wonder if Thomas felt ashamed that first week. Why couldn't he just accept what the others said? Why did he have to see for himself? I wonder if the next week he thought about not going back to join them. He wasn't "one of them" anymore. He was the doubter. The one who hadn't seen.

And yet, he went back. And maybe he went back because he had loved Jesus so much that he needed to hear them talk about him, even if he wasn't so convinced it was true yet. Maybe he went back because it was easier than being alone. Maybe he went back because he thought maybe, just maybe, Jesus would come again. For whatever reason, he went back to the disciples in his hour of greatest doubt, and that day Jesus appeared and he believed.

Doubt can be the thing that propels us to faith. It can be what shakes us up. It can be what pushes us out of the doors of our once comfortable places and into a new, and better, world. Doubt can be the ticket that starts our journey to new life. It can be a sign not of the absence of God, but of God working in us to do something new. Isn't that wonderful to have God working within us?

It is wonderful to hear in these worrying times of all the people helping their neighbours and in some cases getting to know their neighbours properly for the first time, helping with shopping, picking up prescriptions, phoning or texting someone they have not seen for a while, or smiling and saying hello to someone out for their exercise or in their gardens. Three neighbours stood in their respective gardens on Easter Sunday morning listening as one of them read the Easter story from the Bible. It was wonderful to hear them shouting out Easter greetings. This is God working within us all.