

## Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter: John 20:19-31 – ‘Thomas’

Poor old Thomas. Imagine being the one character of history who gets the nickname ‘doubting’. Other famous people get tagged with ‘The Brave’ or ‘The Wise’ or ‘The Just’. And Thomas was at least two of those things: by reputation he later founded the church in India, which is quite a brave and wise thing to do. But no, for all that he did before and after, he’s forever known as the Doubter.

I’ve long felt a bit sorry for Thomas, and that’s partly because we don’t often stop to wonder where Thomas was when Jesus first met the other disciples. The text tells us that the other disciples were locked away, you might say they were self-isolating. What was Thomas doing out and about? The most likely reason was that he was the one brave enough to go and do the shopping. The disciples’ leader had just been executed, and their faces might be known – so it was a genuinely courageous thing to do to be the one who nipped out to the first-century equivalent of Tesco’s.

And perhaps this image of Thomas taking his courage in both hands to leave the house and go shopping means more to us this Easter than it has ever done before. Perhaps it helps us to see Thomas in a more positive light, and to feel more sympathy that if he was indeed showing courage and selflessness, he might rightly feel sad that he was the one to miss out on one of the great episodes of human history... (PAUSE)

In recent years a new term has come into our language – FOMO. It’s an acronym, it stands for **Fear Of Missing Out**, and modern psychologists have concluded that this is one of the great drivers of our current Western society. Largely driven by the way technology has crept into every part of our lives, we hate to miss out on things more than ever before. It’s why so many people are always checking their social media, or the news, or their phones every few minutes – as a society many of us have developed FOMO: a deep fear of missing out.

And when we look at Thomas we can see why – if anyone should get a case of FOMO it would be Thomas. He didn’t just miss the latest celebrity news, or the latest video of dogs which look uncannily like Winston Churchill, he missed the resurrection of the Son of God! He missed seeing his friend and leader do something which had never been done in the whole of human history – come back from the dead.

So maybe we can feel some sympathy. Thomas reacted as most of us do when we miss something really great, our sadness tends to turn into petulance. It’s a natural response fuelled by hurt: it’s a way of saying: ‘Jesus needs to make it up to me, because it’s not fair that I’ve missed out.’

And maybe that’s something we all feel at points in our lives, when things don’t work out as we think they should. *We humans have a natural tendency to credit ourselves for the good stuff and blame God for the bad stuff* – we might as well be honest about that, and it’s something we need to watch carefully in this current season. There’s a mystery to the way the world works, and whilst it’s entirely natural to wonder who’s to blame for all kind of things, the reality of the human condition is that very often we won’t get a good answer to that.

We hold these two great things in tension – God is sovereign, he’s in charge; and yet he also gives us free will, so most of the time we can get on with things.

The problem I’ve observed with most of the answers to difficult events is that they tend to focus on one of these extremes or the other: it’s either *all* us, or *all* God. And so we shout at God, or we shout at our leaders or some other scapegoat.

The story of Thomas tells me that God’s answer is different. Jesus doesn’t reason with us, or argue it out: **he comes to meet us where we are**. Jesus’ answer to Thomas’ hurt is simply *his presence*. ‘Put your hands *here*, and *here*...’ Just like Job in the Old Testament, God’s answer to the difficult questions is the gift of his presence. Here I am: ‘your Lord and your God’.

There will come a time for deep reflection, to understand the purposes of God in all this, but today I want to suggest that **what we need more than anything at this time is the presence of Jesus, for Jesus to meet us where we are**.

And the great truth of our faith is that he still comes to meet us. He breathes the breath of His Spirit on us just as he breathed on his disciples, and utters those glorious words: ‘Peace be with you.’

My prayer is that the warmth of Jesus’ presence will come to each one of you today, and this week, and throughout this season. And I encourage you to invite that presence every day, to offer a simple prayer: ‘Jesus I need you, come close to me, come dwell with me today’ – that we might too receive the blessing of Jesus that he gave to his disciples: ‘blessed are you who have not seen and yet have believed... Peace be with you.’