

**Turning to Christ in Doubt**  
**Sermon on John 20: 19-31**  
**Sunday after Easter**

“For a week I heard the same story  
from each of them,  
and the more often I heard it,  
the less I believed it...”

This is what Thomas says in the Resurrection Remembrances we’ve just heard.

“We had all been through a lot.  
We were in a mess...”  
...is what he lets us know.

Thomas is the disciple that tradition has taught us to call “doubting Thomas”.  
As if we wouldn’t have been like him at all.

Is this fair?

How would you have felt?

Imagine, it was your best friend, your teacher, executed last week, before your eyes.

How would you feel?

Despair?

Horror?

Guilt at not having been able to stop it all?

Disbelief that this could ever have happened?

Wouldn’t you be left with a pain that you couldn’t believe would ever go away?

Would you possibly regret that you had allowed yourself to be ever led into this?

Would you maybe even feel a rising terror that what happened to Jesus, your friend, could happen to you next?

Times were like that...

full of injustice, violence and hasty decisions of those who felt threatened by Jesus’ new ways of loving, living and letting go...

How would you feel?

...when in the midst of your tremendous grief, your friends and colleagues came along and told you that the one who had died, had just been with them?

These are people you thought you knew and could trust...

Had they lost their minds?

You’ve been through a lot together,...

had some good laughs, faced the difficult times, shared food when there was not much to share, learned some hard and unexpected lessons...

And now this.

You were not prepared for their coming up with a sick joke. You weren’t up to black humour in this situation. And you thought they felt as awful about all this as you did.

You thought they were in despair, too.

No wonder Thomas was angry.

No wonder he came up with such a sharp response.

“I don’t believe it. I don’t believe it, and I won’t believe it until I see him myself and put my hands there where the nails were. I don’t believe it – unless I can touch the wound in his side...”

So – was Thomas really “doubting Thomas”? Perhaps, rather, it was despairing Thomas...

This moment must have been a deeply painful moment for him. In the midst of his terrible grief for Jesus, his friend and teacher, he must have felt even more betrayed... utterly betrayed and abandoned by the rest of his friends. It must have been so cruel for him – the way they behaved...

Thomas was in despair.

What had happened to the others?

“I thought that maybe the death hadn’t sunk in...” he wonders in our reading.

The circle of disciples, sheltering behind closed doors in fear of what had happened to Jesus, really had seen...

...well, what?

What had they seen? Who?

Obviously they had had an encounter that left them knowing that they had seen Jesus; ...that left them knowing that Jesus was with them... that they had not been left alone in their grief.

Whatever they’d seen – it had convinced them that Christ had risen. ...that Christ was with them, wishing them peace, giving them strength. They could feel his spirit... enabling them to go on.

And it was this they were trying to report to Thomas.

They wanted to offer comfort, hope...

But Thomas couldn’t see it. Couldn’t accept it, because he knew so well that it could just not be!

And then later – he saw it, too.

In the midst of his despair, his anger, his grief, Christ came to him, invited him to touch the wounds in his risen body.

Thomas anger disappeared.

His black despair vanished, and – he, too, recognised Christ.

He could even speak... “Yes Lord,” he said, “it is you. I see you. You are with me.”

There is something very important about these wounds the disciples had seen.

There is something very significant about these wounds, Thomas wanted to touch in order to be convinced.

Are they there to help him identify Jesus? Reassure him that it is really him?

Or are they more?

Are they reminders of Jesus’ own dreadful suffering, his loneliness on the cross?

Are they there to demonstrate that the risen Christ is the same Jesus who had

suffered so terribly? Who'd been alone in that dark place of pain and horror and grief?

If so – they did certainly reassure Thomas that he had good reasons for his grief and his despair. And this is good!

Thomas needed to be taken seriously in his pain. Only then could he see and believe.

He experiences the miracle of the risen Christ, the stunning shock of the resurrection... and then?

It cannot have been a simple matter of rushing off to celebrate! The experience of the risen Christ is not an immediate end of all grief... is not smoothing out all trouble!

Thomas cannot simply say: "All right, Christ is risen, ok; everything is fine after all."

Christ's presence after the resurrection is surely different from Jesus' company during his life. So much had changed through his death. The people had been changed...

And the resurrection cannot – must not - make the crucifixion undone!

Grief, anger and pain do remain... have to be lived through.

The resurrection puts the crucifixion in a new perspective... gives it an entirely new dimension.

Something essential changes for Thomas and the other disciples.

The world from now on looks different.

They have not lost all hope.

Their friend, their teacher... is with them after all.

He is offering them a chance to build a new and different relationship with him.

He offers them deep hope of new life.

He shows a way forward through the pain.

He shows the possibility of growth.

The possibility of change.

He brings about light in the darkness that wasn't there before.

Thomas experience reminds us that faith is not a remedy for all problems.

The encounter with Christ offers no easy answers; in fact it may not offer any answers at all.

What it does... What Thomas experiences is that the risen Christ offers hope to set against the pain and the grief and the despair that he feels. It does not take them away! It does not offer any explanation... or intellectual discussion. Nothing to reason really.

Just an immediate experience of a need to touch and a moment of being touched. As simple as that.

And from that very moment on Thomas can hear and respond.

He feels comfort and strength... but possibly is left with more questions than he started with.

And it may be the same with us.

Resurrection is not a neat answer to all our questions and difficulties!

Resurrection is a challenge, in which God offers new possibilities, new ways forward...

It brings comfort.

It brings the promise that we are not alone.

But it may not bring ease.

What resurrection does is:

it offers the reassurance that even in the darkest moments of grief, even when we feel most deeply betrayed, even in our most terrible moments of fear, even when we feel that we have failed miserably...

even then Christ is there!

He gives us strength.

He encourages us to find a new beginning.

Thomas' initial rejection of the hope he had been offered, offers us the hope that God can work in us, despite the blindness and stubbornness that we often react with. God wants to be recognised by us – even in the darkest moments.

The disciples had failed Jesus in the last hours before his death, sure. But they were not excluded from witnessing his resurrection. Instead they were among the first to experience it. What hope for us!

It shows so clearly that in those moments when we feel most inadequate and shut off, when we feel we cannot get it right, we cannot believe – we in fact are still worth being touched by God.

What God asks of us is not to seek answers, but to recognise him and respond to him – even in pain and trouble.

God wants us to see him... - not matter what we have gone through – and then together with Thomas say: "My Lord and my God."

God doesn't need more from us than this, to be able to use us.

Isn't that the greatest comfort?

And an even greater challenge?

Let's do our part.

Amen.