

## Certain uncertainty

11 4 10

Almighty God,  
you have given your only Son to die for our sins  
and to rise again for our justification:  
grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness  
that we may always serve you  
in pureness and truth.

My text may be found in John chapter 20 and verse 25: 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

If you studied Geography to 'O' level, then you should know the difference between climate and weather. Weather is what we experience from day-to-day while climate is the long-term pattern of things. Nowadays, we live in a period where we are increasingly concerned with Global Warming and Climate Change. The vast majority of scientific research and opinion points to the potentially disastrous change in the Earth's climate the blame for which is being laid squarely at the door of human activity, principally our levels of carbon emissions.

The problem of this new orthodoxy is the certainty with which scientific judgements are being stated. Recently in December 2009, the University of East Anglia and in particular of the Climate Change Unit under the direction of

Professor Phil Jones was found to be less than scientifically rigorous in its production of data on the melting of the Tibetan glaciers. In the UK last month, the Government's attempt to warn us of the dangers of climate change through rewritten, nursery rhymes (*Jack and Jill could not fetch a pail of water because extreme weather due to climate change had caused a drought*) failed to meet the objective truth criteria for adverts by no less a body than Advertising Standards Agency because probability was being stated as certainty. This situation nicely illustrates the quest for certainty in science where no one's word is taken simply on trust and where certainty is only as good as its evidence on which that certainty rests. What is certain is that things are uncertain while the evidence for that certainty is open to question.

And so to Thomas. Faced with the enthusiasm of the ten disciples who were there when Jesus appeared to them in the Upper Room behind securely shut doors, Thomas remains implacably sceptical. His scepticism earns Thomas the dubious title - Doubting - Doubting Thomas who refused to believe simply because his friends told him it was so. No, indeed: for the possible resurrection of Jesus Christ was far too serious a matter to be taken just on trust, just on their say-so. Thomas wanted proof; Thomas required evidence. Thomas sets out clearly the criteria that need to be met for him to believe and hence my text this morning: 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

Proof for Thomas would be that he too experiences the reality of Jesus' post resurrection body. He wants the evidence of his eyes; he wants the evidence of

his hands: he wants to see and to touch Jesus. And of course he does and of course he does and Thomas, dear Thomas, no longer doubting, says with inspired certainty: 'My Lord and My God.'

And what about us? Are we sceptical? Do we doubt? I can talk till I'm blue in the face (shades of 'Avatar'?) but whatever I say may well be true for me but is it true for you? What we all need to do is to find the answer for ourselves. We all need to be like Thomas and to test reasonably that which may seem beyond reason. Peter took a step of faith when he walked on water (now I don't recommend you try that one for yourself at home or on the beach at Dinard). You too should test the truth claims of Christianity to see if they hold water or are simply a leaky bucket. It is only by challenging his faith that Thomas's faith became sufficient for him to die for what he believed.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's Dinard*

*11<sup>th</sup> April, 2010*

H: Sermon 21: Certain

