

Thomas

3 7 16

Almighty and eternal God,
who, for the firmer foundation of our faith
allowed your holy apostle Thomas
to doubt the resurrection of your Son
till word and sight convinced him:
grant to us, who have not seen, that we may also believe
and so confess Christ as our Lord and God.

Our text today may be found in John's gospel chapter 20 and verse 28:

'My Lord and my God !'

Do you have favourites ? As a teacher, some of my pupils were nicer than others but I was well impressed by a colleague who once told that he liked all his pupils the same ! That said what about the twelve disciples ? So which one do you like best ? Peter the rock ? John the beloved ? Here, at St Bartholomew's surely it's got to be Nathaniel or his friend Philip ? Well, no one in their right mind is going to choose Judas Iscariot though I've just read an interesting study of him by the liberal Catholic writer, Peter Stanford, and it is an eye-opener. But today is the feast of St Thomas the Apostle and, once again, I'd like to look at the disciple who doubted, the disciple who wanted proof, first-hand proof for himself, that Jesus who had just been crucified, died and buried, had in fact risen from the dead as his friends were telling him.

Thomas is an honest, good-hearted man. He has the courage in John 14 to say he doesn't know the way. He has the courage in John 11 to say let's go and die with him and here, in John 20, he has the courage to say, hang on a moment, I want demonstrable proof that what you say is actually true.

I don't know why Thomas wasn't in the Upper Room that first time that Jesus appeared to the other disciples. But when they shared their excitement with Thomas, he was not swept up by their enthusiasm. Instead, Thomas acts like a wet blanket, pouring cold water on their excitement. If what they are bashing on about is actually true, then he, Thomas, should be able to share first-hand in what they are saying. So Thomas sets out his test of authenticity: '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.'

So we have a scientific experiment: sight and touch – seeing and feeling. And as we know, just a week on, Thomas has the chance to see for himself and seeing, in Thomas's case, is believing and he says, 'My Lord and my God !'

Certainly, from John's account, we know that Thomas saw Jesus in the flesh. But what is unsaid in the written text is whether Thomas actually touched Jesus. Our collect for today makes no mention of actual touch. And, as a young man, I certainly thought that Thomas didn't touch Jesus. After all, we're British and we don't go in for all this touching, hugging and kissing nonsense. Actually, in the old days during our service of Holy Communion, even to shake hands with a stranger at the peace was something we didn't do when I was young.

But now, older, wiser, I think Thomas did touch Jesus and his touch was like what Billy Eliot describes as 'Electricity' when the boy describes what it feels when like he's dancing. Touch, being in touch, is connection and the very moment that Thomas touched Jesus, was touched by him, Thomas was in touch.

So Thomas isn't doubting Thomas to my way of thinking. Rather he is an example to us of a proper search for authentic truth. What makes me smile with our modern brand of evangelical atheist is their inability or unwillingness to give God the chance to prove he is in fact real.

Let me leave you, then, with the today's obvious question:

What convinces you that the God we worship is truly our Lord and God ?

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 34 : Thomas

