

## How big is our God?

Acts 4:32-35  
1 John 1:1 – 2:2  
John 20:19-end

Never work with children or animals, the saying goes. Well, I'm not sure about animals, but I definitely don't agree when it comes to 'working' with children. I love it!

Apart from anything else, children are fun – playing, exploring, being curious is what children are all about.

I totally get that it's probably very different if you're a professional teacher, but every time I've been involved with children at church it hasn't felt like 'working' with children – more 'finding out about God' with them.

Children are great. Children 'get it.' And Jesus got that children 'get it' when he selected a child from the crowd around him, put him or her in front of the adults and told the grown ups that we need to become like little children.

And I'm pretty sure Jesus also knew that children come up with some of the best answers to questions.

Someone I know described an occasion when they were speaking to a mixed congregation of adults and children. They posed the question

"How big is God?"

And a child came back quick as a flash

"As big as you want him to be."

"How big is God?"

"As big as you want him to be."

Not that we can change the size of God – but that we can allow ourselves to have as expansive or as restricted a view of God as we want.

"As big as you want to allow him to be."

"As big as I want to allow him to be."

And how big might that be?

It's tempting, when we look at the mess of the world, the state of the pavements, the queues at the doctors, the lines on our own faces, to think that God must be very small. Otherwise - surely - God would sort it all out. A few bolts of divine lightening, a twiddle on the earth's thermostat, some judiciously placed miracles and it would all be sorted.

At least for ten minutes or so, until it all got messed up again. Perhaps God is bigger – and wiser, than we think....

I wonder what our Bible readings this morning might tell us?

In his first letter, John writes of Jesus existing from the very beginning, of God being light, and of Jesus being the way through which we can be forgiven our sins and receive the gift of new life. That sounds like a pretty big God to me.

The passage from Acts spoke of the work of the Holy Spirit - taking ordinary, failing, vulnerable human beings and turning them into a community so generous that they offered and shared not only their money and material possessions, but all that they were. That seems like a God of miracles.

And we have just heard in the Gospel of Jesus coming and standing among the disciples on that first Easter day. Jesus who had been brutally executed. Alive and – inexplicably - physically with them in a locked room. Death defeated. Bodily resurrection. New life. God without limits.

And then Jesus' response to Thomas – full of insight and compassion as he meets Thomas' personal need. *'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.'*

God who knows us each by name. Knows and satisfies our deepest longings for recognition, belonging and assurance.

How big is our understanding of God. Of Jesus?

How big was Thomas's understanding of Jesus?

Poor Thomas – he often gets a bad press, as if this one passage of scripture sums up the entirety of who he was and what he did.

Yet, he's named in the original list of Jesus twelve close disciples; he had known, lived with Jesus for years. Some traditions even suggest he was one of Jesus' brothers....

He's the one who, when the others don't want to go to Jerusalem, bravely encourages them to go too 'so we can die with him' – the bold words of someone who's fully committed to Jesus.

He's there at the Last Supper, too. The one who, when Jesus confuses them all by saying they know the way to the place that he's going to, has the courage to speak out for all of them - "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

And again - Thomas – brave enough not to be hiding with the others on that first Easter Sunday evening, and brave enough to admit his uncertainty when he returns to their tale of the risen Jesus. Perhaps rather than 'doubting Thomas' we should refer to him as 'courageous Thomas'.

Courageous enough to ask questions. To voice doubts. To persistently hang on in there when everyone else had experienced something he hadn't

And then in that moment in the locked room  
through his doubt,  
his questioning,  
his wrestling,  
his bravery...  
...and the love and faithfulness of the other disciples - his church community - who  
embraced and held him in his questioning

...he was rewarded with a much, much bigger picture of Jesus.  
Not just his teacher, his Master  
Not only his Lord, his King  
but also his God.  
In John's retelling - the first of the twelve for whom the penny really drops.

How big was Thomas's understanding of Jesus?

I'd like to suggest that it moved from – this is a guy I know pretty well and want to be around  
to  
Wow! Jesus *is God!* What does that mean for me? And for my every day life? And for what I  
want to do with it?

How big was Thomas's understanding of Jesus?

And how big is ours?

Maybe we too have had a knowledge of God, of Jesus, for many years. Maybe for our whole  
life....

Maybe we're pretty sure about God. We have faith. We know Jesus and all that he's about  
But, hang on - so did Thomas and the disciples.

So did the crowd on Palm Sunday  
So did the religious leaders of the day  
Or at least, that was what they thought...

Of course, what they all missed was that God is the God of surprises....  
God is without limits – there will always be more of God than we can know or even imagine,  
and we should never think that we know all that can be, or needs to be, known.

Doubt, curiosity, exploration  
All are important  
They are not to be shied away from  
For not only do they bring us a bigger picture of God...  
A greater joy in believing....  
They also strengthen us and give us resilience.

Seeing God from one perspective only can leave us vulnerable to unexpected events or  
questions, and rock or even destroy our faith at a time when we most need it.

Maybe you remember the parable of the sower? Of the seed that sprouted but didn't put down deep roots so withered away in the sun. Or the seeds which began to grow, but were choked by the thorns around it.

Maybe you know people whose lives have been like that. Whose understanding of God was great for every day living, but not broad enough to support them in a time either of great difficulty – or even of great success. People whose faith crashed to the ground, or simply drifted away....

So – what might we do, to follow in Thomas's footsteps and gain a deeper understanding of God.

Maybe we could do worse than to do what he did

Acknowledge our doubts, access our curiosity, allow ourselves to explore (lots of As there)

Be bold and brave in addressing them

And, as Thomas did, do it in community with those who will walk with us and support us as we go. And actually, in common with each other, for we all have questions. (And if we don't, then we need to be asking why, and what we might be missing.)

Allow questions, bravely face up to them, in community –

A,B, C. What could be simpler?

So – Like Thomas may we not hide our doubts, but address them boldly and bravely, in community with others

Like him may we be rewarded with a more expansive, a more glorious picture of our Lord and our God, which brings us joy and builds our resilience

And like the child answering the question, "How big is God?" may we respond, "as big as we allow Him to be!"

