

Sunday 11th April – Easter 2

Acts 4:32 – 35
John 20:19-end

Thomas Doubtful – Sarah Penfold

I have been thinking about the Annunciation. Why? Because today's Gospel reading seems to me to contain a lot of 'What ifs?', and the first one is, 'What if Mary had looked at the angel and refused to listen because he was only a messenger and not God himself?'. It would not have been an unreasonable reaction, either then or now. Don't worry I'm not going to explore that particular 'what if?' but it does make you think.

In an age of allegedly fake news and with the knowledge that being on the internet doesn't make something true we try to be discerning and I expect we all have friends that we view as more reliable sources of information than others.

'What if Thomas had been present with the others on that first Easter evening?'

The disciples are having a hard time. Their leader has been killed. Someone who they thought was their friend has been instrumental in this. They don't know what their future holds but in their fear they are meeting behind a barred door. It must have been hard for those present to grasp that a man can walk through locked doors, that a man can be alive who has been crucified, that he bears the marks, even if you have seen him and heard him speak. But if you are only being told this by your friends? We don't know why Thomas was absent that night but, in his reaction, I get a sense of both bravado and pathos. If the others told him that he had missed receiving the Holy Spirit it is not surprising that he felt left out. It is not surprising that Thomas will not believe the other disciples.

What if Thomas can only accept the truth from Jesus himself?

It is quite difficult to put ourselves into his sandals. The other disciples could be telling the truth. Or they could be playing some sort of sick joke. Would he in reality have had an expectation of seeing Jesus alive? That probably depends how closely he had listened and how deeply he had thought about what Jesus had told them when he was alive. He could have felt that he missed his only chance to see the risen Jesus.

For Thomas it was really important to see Jesus. We don't know whether or not he did put his hand into his side, possibly when it came to it Jesus'

presence was enough. I like to think so. He needed the message in a form that he could believe.

Although with God anything is possible it is fair to say that we can have no expectation of seeing Jesus, but we can have an expectation of feeling his presence especially at difficult times. Many Christians will share experiences of being alone, but not being alone. Feeling that invisible arm around the shoulders when comfort was needed. Of knowing that a guardian was with them at a difficult time. At some point we will all have experienced a credible source of the reality of Christ, if not the feeling of that other presence maybe a teacher, maybe reading the Bible, listening to someone speak that has led us to believe.

What if we ourselves are called to spread the truth?

We should not be fooled into thinking that only 'very special' people will be those sources. I have a strong memory of going to church with some friends on the Sunday after Easter. We were staying with them and they were keen that we went as the Bishop was coming and the Vicar was concerned there would be a poor turn out! Our six-year-old son had gone into Sunday school with our friends' children and over coffee I asked him how he had got on. They had sung some songs he knew and had a story about Thomas Doubtful. Helpfully I told him that we had also had that story and that the Bishop had told us about it. There was a pause. He looked at me sagely and announced, 'Ours was better. Our was told us by somebody's Dad'.

I'm guessing that if either the Bishop or the Dad had overheard that they would have been amused and in the one case flattered. But then that is the point of the Christian message of love. It is to be received and shared. Not shared by bishops and clergy and received by the rest of us. Received and shared by us all. 'As the father has sent me, so I send you'.

Many of us may have no recollection of how we originally heard about Jesus. At first the stories from the Bible were probably just that – stories. Some people talk about great moments when they believe for the first time, for others the process is slow and gradual. Thomas may have been more reluctant to believe the resurrection than the other disciples but having acknowledged Jesus as his 'Lord and God', he went on to spread the Gospel, it is thought as far east as India.

We ourselves need to be ready to share the good news of Jesus. Stop panicking. I'm not thinking standing on a soap box outside Asda, but of some of the things we have been talking about during Lent. Serving the community. Welcoming people into our churches. Demonstrating our togetherness. Of course, we will never know what Thomas was thinking when he insisted that he must touch the risen Jesus, but those words 'My Lord and my God', are

unambiguous. Part of his credibility is his move from doubt to belief. Nothing will convince people of our purpose more effectively than our actions, our authenticity. It is often just the little things. The smile, the 'Good morning', the phone call. A few years ago Wendy reminded us of the importance of popping into church, rather than just passing. Where people are seen to go others will follow if only out of curiosity. They want to see what attracts others. Like Thomas they need to see.

Jesus greets the disciples, 'Peace be with you'. The Jewish word for peace is shalom. Apparently, it has quite a broad meaning – to include a whole sense of wellbeing. Peace of mind, of body, and a sense of belonging within our homes and our church. Who would not want to share that peace?

Shalom.