

Second Sunday of Easter Year A 19 April 2020 (Revd. Dave Deeny)

Lectionary Readings: John 20:19-31, Peter 1:3-9



“Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

I have given my reflection this morning the title - **See and believe!** There are some things in life that one just has to see to believe. You may have come across an interesting book and television series by Robert Ripley called **"Believe It or Not."** This contained a collection of strange and amazing things that were unbelievable.

One such ‘unbelievable story is of a boy who went to the doctor because he had a pain in his foot. The doctor discovered that the boy had a tooth growing in the bottom of his foot. Another ‘believe it or not’ story is that of a man who had a chicken that apparently laid square eggs. Now I have seen white eggs, brown eggs, even spotted eggs, but I have never seen a square egg. Can you believe these things? I would have to see them to believe them! Life is filled with a lot of things that I would have to see to believe.

In our Gospel today, we have Thomas' 'believe it or not' moment. After Jesus rose from the grave, he appeared to a group of his disciples. However, Thomas was not with them. When the disciples told Thomas that they had seen Jesus and that he was alive, Thomas said, "I won't believe it until I see it with my own eyes." What he had been told by the disciples was so unbelievable, that he had to see the proof before he would believe it!

A week later, Thomas received this proof! The disciples were together again. This time Thomas was with them. Jesus once again stood among them and said to Thomas,

"Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Thomas had now seen what he initially could not believe, and, faced with the facts, he had no option but to respond, "My Lord and my God!"

We believe that Jesus rose from the grave even though we have not seen it with our own eyes. We believe the message of those who *did* see it with their own eyes. Sadly, the message of the gospel is totally unbelievable to many people today. In my role as a Chaplain, in my Christian Education classes, I teach students the story of Jesus which for them, is quite frankly, unbelievable! I explain things as well as I can, and then I explain it again and again ... often to blank faces. Then I try a different tack ... until eventually, someone in the class suddenly has a 'Thomas moment' and 'gets it.' Then there is a buzz and a ripple as that pupil explains it to another in a way they can relate to better. Then a second pupil gets it, and a third, and a fourth, and the understanding spreads through the class because of the first person grasped the concept and was able to explain it in a way that the pupils could understand.

We at St Christopher's are part of a community of faith. We believe, even though we have not seen Jesus' resurrection directly. The testimony of the resurrection has been passed down to us by our faith mentors as well as in the Holy Scripture. We have become witnesses of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus in and through our lives. If we step back and look at the whole story recorded in the Gospels, it is evident that Jesus

was patiently teaching us to believe the unbelievable. Our Gospel passage this morning ends by clearly telling us what the purpose of John's Gospel is:

“³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

Once that penny drops, once we have our 'Thomas moment', it puts a whole new perspective on our lives.

The Epistle reading from Peter sums this up wonderfully:

“³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a **living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading ...”**

How does this living hope translate into our lives? In our current context, we continue to live through the COVID 19 pandemic. The fear of infection and death is widespread. These passages assure believers that in the truth of the resurrection as experienced by Thomas, we have an inheritance that is imperishable. Yes, death is a terrible thing, and by all accounts, particularly so for those who die of the corona virus. Yet, in Christ, death, however horrible the physical reality may be, has lost its sting.

Indeed, the world has a myriad of other trials that we face. Some of these are intensely personal and private. They may not be known to anyone but ourselves. Yet in all these things, Peter assures us that:

“⁶ In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷ so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

Peter is saying that in all things, we should give praise, glory and honour to God. The Epistle reading ends on this hugely encouraging message that echoes the Gospel message for today:

“⁸ Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an **indescribable and glorious joy**,⁹ for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

The focus here is *not* on the transformation of life's issues in the here-and-now, but on a refocusing away from present hardships towards a salvation to come in the heaven,

“ ... ⁴ into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.”

Christ is risen and has conquered death. Thomas received proof of this fact; a fact that for him was initially unbelievable. Christ's resurrection is our guarantee! The here-and-now is a time of exile. We do not belong in this world. We live by faith in the life that is to come.

As I draw this reflection to an end, I am mindful that we live in the confidence of knowing that despite the adversities that we may face in this world, we have a **living hope in the risen Jesus**. We live in a world that seems to vacillate between difference stances on spiritual and other contentious issues. On the one hand, many people uncritically accept every sensational social media post, especially when it strengthens their political position or confirms long-held beliefs. On the other hand, some skeptically question things that seem unbelievable. This could be through statements such as “that image is photo-shopped!” Or in the words of one of our esteemed political leaders, “that is fake news!” People often therefore appear to swing between blind faith and ‘blind’ doubt. “I cannot see it, touch it or feel it. Therefore, it isn't!”

Perhaps it is time to let Thomas be our guide. We should not be afraid to ask questions or seek evidence on matters on which we are unclear. God can stand up to this

scrutiny! We should also not be afraid to proclaim the amazing reality that is the resurrection of Jesus. We are able to see with open-eyed faith, the historicity of Jesus' life and resurrection. In this knowledge we are able to say confidently that he is my Lord and my God.

That is something that our world also desperately needs to see and hear. May we loudly and proudly proclaim along with Thomas ...

“My Lord and my God!”

Amen.

The Reverend Dave Deeny