

John 20:19-31 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus^(a)), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe^(b) that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name

Thomas

People have believed in all sorts of whacky stuff through the centuries. And they still do. People have believed in astrology, phrenology, homeopathy and alchemy. They have believed that there were special plants that could grow lambs (apparently a legend that came from seeing cotton for the first time). And we teach kids to believe in the tooth fairy. There are genuinely people who believe that the earth is flat, and travel to conferences (all around the world!) with other people to discuss theories of how flat the earth is. For any majority belief, there must be a minority who question this belief and even hold that it is part of an elaborate conspiracy.

I can't go any further without observing that we who believe in God are often lumped in with those who believe in astrology or a flat earth. There is no scientific proof of Christianity. Plenty of people will tell us it's just wishful thinking and a crutch for the weak. We may reply that science describes repeatable, natural phenomena, while we are talking about God and *supernatural* phenomena, which are irregular, and beyond scientific proof... But if you are determined that there is nothing beyond your senses and scientific proof then this all seems a bit lame.

Enter our friend Thomas. In the first three gospels he is only named, but John gives him three important cameos. When Jesus proposes going towards Jerusalem Thomas says 'let us also go that we may die with him'. Thomas shows clear-eyed faithfulness to Jesus: seeing the expected outcome but being willing to go anyway.

Later, on the night of the last supper, Jesus talks about going to his Father's house, where there are many rooms. Thomas has the courage to admit that he hasn't got a clue what Jesus is talking about. He wants an address. Thomas seeks clarity.

Finally, we meet him here after the resurrection. He has missed an encounter with Jesus, and these rumours are all too new and strange. He doesn't want to be led by a fantastic delusion. He wants to be clear. He's not falling for flat-earth theory nor tooth fairy stuff. Thomas seeks clarity, again. He can't believe this without some evidence.

Later, Jesus appears to Thomas, and knows exactly what he has asked for — he immediately shows him his hands and his side. This isn't reproach for his lack of faith. It is giving him the evidence he seeks. Thomas's reaction, on seeing his hands and side is the reaction of faith we always knew he had: "My Lord and my God".

Jesus then says: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Again, Jesus is neither ticking off Thomas, nor praising gullibility. He acknowledges that most Christians for all time are going to have to believe without the tactile proof. How wonderful that Jesus praises and blesses *us* for having faith without this tactile evidence!

Our evidence for the resurrection is significant, but founded on the circumstances. From the earliest days of Christianity the resurrection and the empty tomb have been central to our faith. No splinter of Christianity that questioned these has lasted long. The empty tomb was so central that Jews and Romans alike had only one thing to achieve to shut down our faith — find Jesus's dead body. But they never did.

We have the strong evidence of the changed behaviour of the disciples. Cowed men became fearless, bold and urgent in their sharing of the faith. Not one of them recanted in the face of death. They knew what they had seen. People who had paid the faith no attention, or even persecuted it turned around and behaved the same way — Paul had no qualms dying for the faith. And Thomas? Tradition has it that he carried the gospel eastwards, taking Christianity to India, and that he was martyred near Chennai.

Thomas *did* doubt at first. That's not a problem. That's all right. Because doubt and questions led him to answers, and then action. He knew what would satisfy his need for further evidence and Jesus graciously gave him that evidence. Doubting Thomas became faithful Thomas!

You may have heard it said that doubt is not the enemy of faith, but certainty. When doubt makes us question, search and wrestle, this doubt makes us stronger. There are many questions of faith for which I lack a good answer. I hope not to leave it there, but to grow in knowledge, understanding and wisdom, which should then lead to faithful action.

I'd encourage you to do the same: take doubt as a cue to ponder, discuss and grow.

Perhaps you doubt? *What* do you doubt? What answer would you require to increase *your* faith? Whom could you talk to about this?

A prayer: Lord Jesus, we all have doubts — moments of doubt, or seasons of doubt. There are times when you seem far off and the faith we have known seems like an illusion. But you met with Thomas and allayed his doubts. We pray that you might gently meet our doubts, or the doubts of the people we love, and answer them, and bring us to new and life-giving faith. **Amen.**

SDG.