

**BLESSED DOUBT** (Lindfield 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2019)

**JOHN 20: 19-31**

The story of Thomas has always been one of my favourites. Of course it's not just a story about Thomas. It is also a story about frightened disciples. So scared, in fact, they hid behind locked doors. And who can blame them? They had just witnessed the one they had confessed to be the Messiah betrayed by one of his own, tried and convicted by both religious and civil authorities, and then brutally crucified. Little wonder they were afraid, assuming the next step would be to round up Jesus' followers. But when Jesus comes on the scene, their fear falls away and is replaced by joy.

This, I think, is the way faith should work. Yes, perhaps you've got doubts and questions and fears, but then God arrives and all those fall away, replaced by joy and wonder and, of course unshakeable faith.

But that's not the way it works with Thomas. He doubts. He questions. He disbelieves. He's not satisfied with second-hand reports and wants to see for himself. And again I would say, who can blame him? He was, after all, one of those who saw his Lord and friend mistreated, beaten and then crucified and has probably spent the last few days pulling the broken pieces of his life back together and trying to figure out what to do next. In fact, he might have already started getting on with his life – why else, I wonder, is he out and about when the rest of the disciples are hiding behind locked doors?

So after the joyous celebration of Easter do we make room for all the Thomas's in our world? I suspect there is an enormous number of them, even among those who worshipped with us and certainly among those with little or no familiarity with our congregation or faith.

Thomas does come to believe. He sees Jesus for himself, And after that experience he not only assents or consents to the witness of his comrades but makes the most profound confession of faith about Jesus contained in the New Testament, calling Jesus, "my Lord and my God", bookending the confession in John Ch. 1 where the eternal word that becomes flesh is not only with God but is God.

But all of that comes after he had a chance to voice his doubt. And sometimes, faith is like that – it needs the freedom of questions and doubt to really spring forth and take hold. Otherwise, faith might simply be confused with a repetition of creedal formulas, or giving verbal consent to the faith statements of others. But true, vigorous, vibrant faith comes from the freedom to question, wonder and doubt.

Not for everyone, of course. For some, faith comes more easily. Maybe many of the other disciples were like that (although let's not forget that they got to see what Thomas asked for!). But for others it's harder.

We have no idea what the other disciples thought of Thomas's initial scepticism. Maybe they were scandalised. Or maybe they sympathised. Further, I suspect that John's whole point in including this story in his Gospel is to affirm the faith of the community, a group of people who "had not seen yet believed". But today I think we should make room for a little doubt.

Indeed, if we don't have any doubts we're probably not taking the story seriously enough. I mean, really – think about what we confess when we come together on Sundays: that the Creator of the vast cosmos not only knows we exist but cares deeply and passionately about our ups and downs, our hopes and dreams and all the rest. This confession is, quite literally, in-credible (that is, not believable). And yet we come together and in hearing the Word and partaking in the Sacraments and being joined by those around us through prayer and song, we come to believe.

For some it is easy. For others more difficult. For some, hearing the testimony of Scripture is enough. For others they need something more personal and direct. It's OK to have questions. Indeed it would be strange if we did not. Questions and wonder and doubt and even scepticism are signs of interest and curiosity and these, quite often are the soil in which seeds of faith are planted and grow and blossom.

*On the card in your seat you are invited to write down one thing you have a question about regarding your faith. It might be something you've wondered about for years or something that popped into your head during the Service today. You can put your name on it if you wish – that's entirely up to you. Pop the card in the offering plate or write it out at the end of the service and put it in the plate in the foyer on your way out.*

Thomas came to faith because he had the chance to voice his doubt and question and then experience Jesus for himself. Perhaps you can have that experience today. But what does Jesus say to Thomas? This is the real answer for us: "Because you have seen me you believe: blessed are those who have not seen yet believe." We are truly blessed because we have not seen yet believe. Maybe that's the very nature of faith itself. We don't need to see to believe. When we believe, then we truly see.

AMEN

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