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Dear Friends

“Blessed are those who have not seen but come to believe” (John chapter 20 v 19-31)

The second Sunday of Easter is known as Low Sunday, a rather fitting name, as over these last days our journey together has been an intense one indeed. We have shared what can only be described as an emotional and spiritual roller-coaster ride. We have walked the way of our Lord. He has washed our feet. We have wept at the foot of the cross and we have experienced the grief before being catapulted to Joy in the Resurrection.

Is it any wonder that we are feeling exhausted and a little on the low side? I know I speak for many when I say the post Easter break is more than welcome! Meanwhile, in the secular world, the Easter bunny has departed. No more chocolate to consume. The bank holiday has happened and certainly felt different this year. What’s known as the octave of Easter has now closed its doors.

The closed doors are where we begin our gospel today with the post resurrection account of Thomas’s encounter with Jesus. Let’s remember that John’s Gospel is written for one purpose so that all will come to believe that Jesus died and rose again, in other words to believe in the resurrection, the presence of the living God with us.

John writes at least 60 years after the first Easter and many years after the synoptic gospels were penned. The belief then was that Jesus would return soon. However, time for the early Christians is passing by and for many the seed of doubt may have taken root and grown out of control. So much has happened. Jerusalem had been destroyed. The Jewish community dispersed. Pagan converts had grown in number and Rome was rather uncomfortable to say the least. There was still a threat to Rome’s National security even though they thought they had nailed it to the cross. Being a Christian was more dangerous than ever before (that’s certainly still the case in many parts of the world), so it is not hard to see why doubts occurred. John writes into this situation. He acknowledges the difficulty some have believing in the resurrection and he does this by encouraging us to consider the character of Thomas, and his encounter and experience of the risen Lord.

Thomas is known as the one who doubts. Why is this the case? Let’s be honest, would we react any differently? Was he really a doubter? Or is he being portrayed as such by John in order to make his point? I am sure the other disciples had their doubts too. We all have doubts. We haven’t seen, so why do we believe? Why should we be content with what others tell us. But you know as well as I do that belief isn’t just about seeing with our eyes it’s about experience in our hearts.

We don't hear much about Thomas in the synoptic gospels, but in John's account he is mentioned three times, where he is seen as faithful and loyal and continued to proclaim the gospel.

We can all identify with Thomas. I feel for him, in the first instance, because he seems to have missed out on encountering the risen Lord initially. We don't know why, but maybe that's not what is important because Jesus meets him just where he is, just as he comes to us and meets us where we are. We all have our own experiences of the risen Lord, which are personal to us, and to this day the Lord comes to people in ways that speak to them in times of doubt, times of sorrow and of joy.

What I admire the most about the character of Thomas is he is just so honest, he is brave enough to say it as it is. He speaks his mind, he is inquisitive and he wants answers to the difficult questions. He refuses to brush doubt under the carpet. He acknowledges his doubt and this, I feel, is part of the seeing. Faith and doubt go together, they are like two side of the same coin. In this encounter he helps us to open the locked doors of our own minds and hearts by encouraging us to face up to our own doubts.

As such, Thomas's encounter with the risen Lord brings blessing and peace, and it is at this moment that he speaks the familiar words of scripture, 'My Lord and my God'. A confession of his belief. He is convinced, and so the proclamation comes from he who doubts. The doubt here becomes an open door to faith.

For me the post-resurrection accounts are not about dead men walking but are about belief in the presence of the loving Lord who we experience in our lives. He who brings peace to our spirit nourishes and sustains us and strengths us when we have doubts, transforming our faith. The resurrection makes perfect sense to me in the light of my own experience. What I understand about myself, others and life in general. A creator God, a faithful God, a living God.

We know the spirit of the living God is alive and with us today. It's not in some remote world but with us, just as it has been since time began, on earth as it is in heaven. We see it in creation, in the smiles as parents hold their new born child, in our own children when they deal with difficulties, with maturity and confidence, in the text message that asks 'are you ok'? In the response of food banks and vaccination centres. The risen Lord touches our lives in so many ways. In fact, it is what allows us to be truly alive!

This story is saying, it is ok to doubt, in fact doubting is helpful, as it helps us to grow in our faith.

So I leave you with a quote from the famous author C S Lewis, who puts it like this:-

"If ours is an examined faith we should be unafraid to doubt. If doubt is eventually justified, we were believing what clearly was not worth believing. But if doubt is answered, our faith has grown stronger. It knows God more certainly and it can enjoy God more deeply".

Love in Christ

Belinda