

## **Thomas's story by Rev John Castle**

A sermon given on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2025  
at St Michael's Church, Sandhurst

Reading: **John 20:19-31** (Lectionary Year C, Easter 2)

### **Introduction: Easter – true or false?**

Would you believe me if I told you that last Sunday at the Parish Communion and Family Services we had a visit from the Easter Bunny? If you watch the Easter Sunday Parish Communion service on Youtube you will see it for yourself. Except that we discovered that the Easter Bunny was really one of our choir members inside a costume.

Does it matter whether there is an Easter Bunny, as long as we can still get chocolate Easter eggs? But the question we considered last week was whether Jesus really was raised from the dead. Since our hope of eternal life depends on Jesus' victory over sin and death, then it surely does matter. The final words of John chapter 20 explain that the miracles of Jesus, including rising from the dead,

... 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.<sup>1</sup>

### **Can you believe it?**

Faith is key to the Christian life. But what is faith? Christianity is built on the resurrection of Jesus – but how easy is it to believe? Why do some believe and others don't? We heard last

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<sup>1</sup> John 20:31 NRSV

week from Luke's gospel that when Mary Magdalene, Joanna and the other women told the apostles that they'd seen angels who told them that Jesus was alive, the apostles did not believe them. Some people today find it hard to believe in miracles, especially the Resurrection of Jesus, because they have come to believe that everything must have a scientific explanation. Others are sceptical of religion in general, either because historically religion has often been used for evil ends, or because they've been personally hurt by people in the church. Some used to believe in God, but can't understand how God could have allowed someone they love to suffer from cancer or some other terrible illness. They feel disappointed by God, and have lost faith in him.

### **The story of Thomas**

I think disappointment was a key part of Thomas's difficulty in believing what the other disciples told him about seeing Jesus alive. Like Jesus' other followers, Thomas had invested his hopes for the future of Israel, and his own life, in Jesus the Messiah.<sup>2</sup> He felt massively let down, and it hurt badly. Why had God allowed Jesus to be arrested and cruelly put to death, when he had done nothing wrong? And now he was being asked to get his hopes up again. But Thomas was not going to allow himself to be hurt again. The only thing that would persuade him would be to actually put his fingers into the nail holes in Jesus' hands and the spear wound in his side. Only then would he know that Jesus really was alive.

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<sup>2</sup> See also the words of Cleopas and his friend in Luke 24:21

Something of Thomas's character was seen earlier in John's Gospel. In chapter 11 when Jesus said he was going back to Judaea, in spite of the danger from his enemies, Thomas commented, "Let us also go, that we may die with him"<sup>3</sup>. Thomas perhaps had a tendency to see that the glass was half empty. And at the Last Supper, when Jesus talked about going to God the Father to prepare a place for us, Thomas couldn't make any sense of it.

'Lord, we don't know where you're going. So how can we know the way?'<sup>4</sup>

We all respond to the Christian faith in our own way. We have come to faith in different ways, and we have different ways of making sense of things. Some of us are comfortable with ideas and concepts; others, like Thomas, are much happier with practical, tangible things. We all have our own questions, doubts, things we wrestle with. We come to God with our own individual stories, which may include difficult past experiences or traumas, rejection, failure and disappointment.

Is it wrong to have doubts? Should we just accept everything we are told and believe it blindly? Let's see how Jesus responds to Thomas.

### **Jesus' response to Thomas**

When Jesus comes to the disciples the second time, a week after his resurrection, he begins by greeting them as before – "Peace be with you". But then he speaks directly to Thomas. He knows exactly what Thomas has been thinking, the exact words

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<sup>3</sup> John 11:16 NRSV

<sup>4</sup> John 14:5 NIV

that he spoke about putting his fingers in the nail holes. And Jesus invites him to do just that. Jesus responds to Thomas in the way Thomas understands. And he does so without judgement. Jesus offers Thomas the chance to touch his wounds. But then he gently encourages him to stop doubting and believe.

Jesus does the same to us. Whatever our hurts, disappointments and doubts, Jesus invites us to reach out and touch him. It won't be through physical touch. But there are other ways we can meet Jesus - in the physicality of the sacraments of baptism, bread and wine, in his Word, the Bible, through being part of the church community, and in the experiences of life shared with him day by day. As Peter wrote in his first letter,

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.<sup>5</sup>

Or as Jesus said,

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe”.<sup>6</sup>

### **What next for Thomas?**

After this, Thomas is mentioned again as being present when Jesus appeared by Lake Galilee, and as being with the other apostles as they prayed for the coming of the Holy Spirit<sup>7</sup>. Some ancient Christian traditions dating back to the second

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<sup>5</sup>1 Peter 1:8 NRSV

<sup>6</sup> John 20:19b

<sup>7</sup> Acts 1:13

and third centuries say that Thomas later travelled to India, evangelising initially in north-west India and then travelling to the south, where he founded churches. He is said to have been martyred in Chennai in 72 AD. The Saint Thomas Christians of southern India trace their origins to the mission of Thomas<sup>8</sup>.

Thomas is often called “Doubting Thomas” because he didn’t believe what his fellow apostles told him. But I think it’s unfair to give him this title. Remember that the other apostles didn’t believe Mary Magdalene. It was because Thomas had believed so strongly that he was so hurt, and afraid to trust again. But once Jesus met him, his first words were words of true faith, “My Lord and my God.”

Let’s not write ourselves or others off because at times it’s difficult to believe. Being part of the believing community can help us to regain our confidence in God. And Jesus will always be there, reaching out to us and inviting us to trust him. He still has great plans for us, as he did for Thomas. And he really *is* alive.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_the\\_Apostle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_the_Apostle)