

## St Barbara's, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020 – Recorded Sermon

Good morning, and God bless you wherever and whoever you are. I'm sorry not to be seeing you face to face.

The intensity of the gospels' telling of the Easter story brings out some wonderful, individual cameos, which I am sure the Holy Spirit highlighted for us all to subsequently ponder and learn from, and not least, this one of Thomas.

We gain a little bit of insight about Thomas from two earlier incidents in John's gospel, chapters 11 and 14, which reveal something of his zeal and his desire to understand thoroughly. It is, of course, the incident we have just heard read that is best known, and from which he is unfairly referred to as 'doubting Thomas'. Unfairly, because a reading of the events of Easter day discloses that most, if not all, of the disciples were in disbelief at some point concerning Jesus' resurrection until they saw Him.

So, let me ask you an initial question. Do you think that Jesus was aware that Thomas would not be present when He appeared to all the other disciples on that Easter Sunday evening, gathered as they were, in fear, behind shut doors? Almost certainly Jesus knew of Thomas' absence. You could almost say it was a set-up for Thomas, and, of course, for you and I, also not there.

Thomas was bold not to be 'locked down' like the others, and he was bold also to stand out and say what he did. He simply wanted to know for certain, using the five-sense realm he was used to thus far in his own experience. There was another realm of reality he would become used to, particularly after Pentecost, but then, he was just sticking out for something he could be personally sure of, without relying on the second-hand experience of someone else's telling.

The next eight days must have been very difficult for him. He probably felt unusually estranged from the other disciples, his companions for three years, but at least he stuck with them, no doubt with their love and help. You can imagine that he kept repeating his pronouncements, at least to himself  
....."Unless I see the nail marks... and place my finger....my hand....."

Did Jesus leave it so long, eight days, in order to deepen that determination and steadfastness in Thomas – something he would certainly need if one day, as seems likely, he was to take this wonderful gospel to India, farther than any of

the other disciples went, truly the 'ends of the earth', another continent, another culture, another language?

When that moment of revealing came for Thomas, he did not need to physically touch Jesus. He realised that Jesus had been there invisibly when he made his earlier response to the others. Jesus had heard what he had said. Perhaps he understood then, at the depths of his being, that Jesus would always, henceforth, be alongside him, physical evidence or not, and he simply bowed in worship, "My Lord and my God."

I was brought up in a Methodist church in Bolton, Lancashire, still going to church services in my teenage years at least once a fortnight. I knew my mum and dad were pleased that I accompanied them. However, I also knew that any belief I had did not amount to a personal 'knowing' of God. It wasn't until I got to university and met, it felt for the first time, someone whose faith in God was so real and buoyant that he easily talked to me about it. I began to pray to the effect that if God existed, and had made everything, and could be evidently real to my third-year lawyer friend, Robin, please would He make Himself known to me personally, in a way that could not be doubted.

It may have been something like eight days that God left me to ruminate and roll that prayer round, as it became a deep longing. Without painting the amazing detail for you, the moment arrived when Heaven responded and Jesus became gloriously real; alongside me, now and for ever.

If we read on through the remaining few verses of this 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel, we get to the whole point of John's writing, "...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." Life! Something you did not have before, however alive you may have felt. Something of a whole new realm and dimension.

So here's my final encouragement to you. If this 'life' of Jesus is not yet a deep 'knowing' within, that does not rely solely on external sources and behaviour patterns, ask with boldness and determination, as dear Thomas did, for Jesus to become deeply real to you. It is a prayer of the heart that He will respond to.

Amen.

Dave Butler