



Sunday Reflection

Season of Easter

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 11 April 2021

Easter 2

Today we continue to celebrate the power of life over death and to see our lives in the light of the resurrection. We reflect on the powerful love of God that breaks down our defences of fear or doubt.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'"

John 20:28

An Illustration to set the scene

For many years, the vergers at a large Anglican church was a woman called Nancy. She was eighty-four, and she suffered with arthritis. Nonetheless, she was faithful at being the first in the church for every service or event, whatever the weather.

She would unlock the heavy doors, switch on the lights and the heating and then stand quietly by the entrance to welcome people.

Though she looked fragile, she had a steely determination and a huge smile. She would notice people who were feeling sad or lost and would guide them to others or sit down herself with them over a cup of tea.

She was one of the few who was always there at morning prayer. One day she confessed to the Rector that she had always been racked by doubt and didn't really know what she believed. "I just keep turning up," she said, "and hoping that's enough."

She and the Rector had several conversations about faith and doubt but nothing was ever quite resolved within her. However, when Nancy was dying, a great peace came to her. She said she had no fear.

She smiled, and said, "If Jesus wants me for a sunbeam, well, I am ready."

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Today's Gospel reading contains many themes. It is a much-loved passage, probably because we can see ourselves in Thomas, who doubted. In fact, legend has it that Thomas took the Gospel to India, and his missionary life caused thousands of people to convert to Christianity. He was ultimately martyred for his faith in AD 72. It is somewhat ironic that, despite all this, he is most remembered for his doubt.

We need to remember that these were very early days after the first Easter. The disciples were reeling from Jesus' crucifixion. They did not yet know the meaning of the resurrection. They were terrified that they too might be killed, so they gathered together behind locked doors. Their defences meant nothing to Jesus, of course. He simply stepped into their place of fear and spoke peace to them. They were overjoyed – except Thomas, who wasn't there.

Faith cannot be secondhand. Thomas needed to see and to know for himself. No one was critical of his honest doubt. It must have been an agonising time for him, knowing he had missed out on an experience that had so transformed the lives of his friends. However, he did not leave – he continued, like Nancy the verger in our illustration, to turn up. So next time, when Jesus stepped once more through the closed doors to speak peace to the disciples, Thomas was there. He did not need to touch Jesus' wounds or see his hands – the encounter took him straight to a place of faith. His declaration is one of the most personal and powerful in the Gospel: “My Lord and my God!” is a statement of faith and identity. It is about the future and the present – it is worship in its truest sense.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

Thomas teaches us that faith is not just about going with the flow, agreeing with others because they say so.

Faith has to be honest.

We love Thomas for his honesty in admitting lack of faith because that's our experience too.

We hold doubt and faith together because, this side of eternity, we have to trust more than we can see. We can't see everything clearly – that's why we call it faith rather than knowledge.

Thomas also teaches us what to do when we find our lives racked with doubt – keep turning up. Keep saying our prayers, keep taking part in the community of worship, keep waiting for our experience to change, and do not be afraid of the truth.

Jesus loved Thomas, as he loves us. He did not love him any less because he asked questions.

And he did not wait for Thomas to express faith before he met his need. Just as Jesus stepped through the locked doors, so he stepped through Thomas' doubt.

Let us be like Thomas – honest before God and others, questioning faith and seeking truth, and ready to bow down in worship of the God who meets us just where we are.

“Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”

John 20:28

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’ spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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