

My Lord and my God

Please read John 20 v 24-31 – and then pray;

Open my eyes Lord that I may see wonderful things in your Word.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the chief cornerstone for the edifice of the Christian faith (Acts 4:10-12). Without the resurrection there would be no Christianity and no faith or hope (1 Corinthians 15: 14-17). Through this mighty act in history, this one stand-out miracle, God openly declared Jesus to be his Son (Romans 1 v 1-4). As J John writes in his book Jesus Christ the Truth; *“It cannot be emphasised enough that without the resurrection Christianity would not exist.”* (p 231). As for Christian doctrines and beliefs – it is of **first importance** (1 Corinthians 15: 1-8)

This is the third resurrection text we have studied from John’s gospel. We have already seen that the apostle John was the first to **believe** Jesus had risen (20:9) and that Mary Magdalene was the first to **see** the risen Lord on that glorious Easter Sunday. On that same day, in the evening, the risen Jesus then appeared to ten of his disciples who were hiding behind locked doors (20:19). He blessed them with his peace twice and was particularly keen to show them his wounds (20:20). Joy filled their hearts, and they experienced Jesus breathing upon them, inviting them to receive the Spirit of life. The preparation for a new mission was now underway (21).

But one disciple was missing from that first encounter with the risen Lord – and that was Thomas. When he returned to the room, probably later that same evening, the ten were quick to tell him that they had **seen the Lord** (25). They could hardly contain their joy and excitement. It spilled over into Thomas’s lap.

What was Thomas’s reaction to their amazing news? Here were ten of his closest friends telling him that they had without a shadow of a doubt seen Jesus alive. Jesus had been with them for a most blessed time! Surely, if ten of your friends insisted that Jesus was alive, that they had seen him, you would believe them, wouldn’t you? This was not an over excited Mary Magdalene speaking, this was *all of* the other remaining disciples. And they were convinced about what they had seen.

Despite their unanimous eye witness testimony and their insistence on Jesus being alive, Thomas expressed with just as much strength;

Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails marks were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.

Thomas’s unwillingness to believe the testimony of the others was emphatic! In order for him to believe what the others were telling him to accept with one voice, he would need to **see** the nail marks, and **touch** the wounds of Jesus. He was not prepared to receive eye witness testimony, even from them! He had to see for himself in order to believe.

The same is true for today. So many people assert that “unless they see”, they will never believe! They will not accept the apostolic testimony. And yet, in order to be saved and to receive eternal life in Jesus, they need to believe (20:31). So, they remain stuck in the thick mud of the darkness and ignorance of unbelief. (Ephesians 4:18)

Thomas was left to stew in the juices of his own unbelief. How true of so many today, pretending to be happy in a commitment to rational scepticism. Thomas will have to go through a whole week of misery before his pride is turned upside down. For now, they all remain behind locked doors, with only Thomas experiencing no joy. He like so many today is left isolated in miserable dogged unbelief.

A week later, on the following Sunday, Jesus stood among them once again in exactly the same way as he had done the week before. The doors were locked. Jesus came and appeared among them in his risen power, and as before, he greeted them with Peace. Thomas is there this time. This is no coincidence, because this time ***Jesus has come specifically for Thomas.***

The risen Lord had clearly heard Thomas’s demands. Jesus knew exactly what Thomas wanted to do in order to believe. Thomas is invited by Jesus to touch his wounds in precisely the way he had demanded. However, and this is the important point, Thomas *does not need to do what he said he needed to do in order to believe.* He did not actually need to touch! The **reality and the physicality of Jesus’s resurrection** are obvious to Thomas. The others had been right. He had been wrong but now he had his personal proof. A bit like John when he *saw* the grave-clothes, Thomas saw and believed.

But what comes next is extraordinary. Thomas makes his outstanding confession of faith. He declares Jesus to be “his Lord and God.” (28)

This bold confession brings John’s gospel full circle. For in his magnificent prologue in the opening chapter, John revealed that Jesus was the Word of God, and was indeed God (John 1:1). Now Thomas, the one who had doubted, declares the Lordship and the Deity of Jesus Christ. We need to notice a few things about this vital confession and apply them to ourselves.

Thomas’s confession must become our confession. This is the Christian declaration of faith! You may well have heard the expression that confession is good for the soul. Indeed, confession ***of sin*** is good for the soul because it brings forgiveness, peace, relief from guilt and reconciliation to God (Psalm 32 v 1-5). But just as important is ***confession of faith.*** It is important for us all to make our own *personal confession* of belief in Jesus as our Lord and God. Is that your belief? Have you made this your personal confession of faith?

Paul writes to the Romans;

That IF YOU confess with YOUR mouth, “Jesus is Lord”, and believe in YOUR heart that God raised him from the dead, YOU will be saved. (Romans 10:9 with my emphasis)

Making our own confession is the gateway to our own salvation. But we notice that the confession is also an act of worship. Thomas declares Jesus to be his God. The Christian worships Jesus as God as well as Lord. This was a remarkable thing for orthodox Jews like

Thomas and the others to do. Nevertheless – they did it, and they were willing to die for this very bold confession of faith. Jesus is Lord and God – not Caesar!

You will have noticed that as your Minister and Worship Leader, I will often include a “Declaration of Faith” in our times of worship. Anglicans regularly recite the Apostle’s or Nicene Creed. It is important to declare our faith from our hearts with one voice as part of our worship. The words need to be declared from our hearts and not just with our lips. We make our confession of faith joyfully and seriously as the Church of Jesus Christ. We are actually joining in the declaration of the Father who has pronounced his Son to be Lord by his resurrection from the dead. As the apostle Paul quotes in an early Christian hymn;

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2: 8-11)

To the glory of God the Father, we worship him as our Lord and our God. This is basic Christianity. This is what unites Christians of all historical eras and of all countries. This is our confession. It is non-negotiable. It defines who is a Christian and who is not a Christian, and who is in the Church and who is not in the Church. It may be disappointing to some, but the Church of Jesus Christ is not as broad as some individuals would like to make it. You can exclude yourself by unbelief and many do! Narrow is the gate that leads to life!

After Thomas makes his confession of faith, Jesus shares an important beatitude. Thomas had believed, says Jesus, because he had seen. But **blessed are those** who believe who have not seen.

The huge majority of people hearing the gospel were not going to see the risen Jesus as Thomas and the others had. Physical sight of the resurrected Jesus would be limited. Jesus would soon ascend into heaven. Others would be blessed as they believed the apostolic testimony and preaching without physically seeing Jesus. Thomas had not believed that testimony, but such testimony and preaching was the way forward into eternal life and joy.

The world now is invited to believe through the preaching of a gospel which highlights the atoning death and physical resurrection of Christ. We are now invited to believe without seeing, and if you do believe on the basis of the message, then you will be blessed with life in Jesus’s name (20:31). You cannot experience this “life in his name” unless you first believe from the heart. Once you believe, and place your faith in Jesus as Lord and God, you will enter into abundant life (John 10:10) which is also eternal life (John 11:25-26) given by Jesus, who is the Resurrection and the Life.

The apostle Peter describes the Christian position beautifully;

*Though you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him **now**, you believe in him and filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:8-9)*

This is why Thomas and the others apostles, and indeed why *we* are **sent (20:21)** into the world with the good news of life and forgiveness through Jesus. The world must be given the opportunity to hear and receive the message for themselves. Each person can become a child of God through belief in Jesus and experience adoption into God's family. (John 1:12-13)

The only explanation that can be given as to why these cowardly, defeated, distressed and disorientated disciples suddenly became faithful and fearless soldiers of Christ willing to lay down their lives for their faith and their resurrection message, is that they had seen the Lord alive. They were absolutely convinced he had defeated death. Jesus gave them irrefutable proofs (Acts 1:3) that he was alive over a period of forty days, and as he promised, he sent his Spirit upon them so that they could be empowered and emboldened to witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The eyewitness testimony of the apostles has to be true.

Believe it wholeheartedly and know life in his name!

Will we share this good news with others and invite them to believe in the One who we know to be the Resurrection and the Life? Although we can't see him, we **know** he lives in our hearts by his Spirit. Will we worship and serve Jesus as our Lord and God? Are we ready to suffer ridicule for this message if necessary, for many today claim to be intellectually astute, and pride will not allow them to accept it? In the same way that Paul was described as "mad" by King Agrippa (Acts 26:24) for his message about the resurrection (Acts 26:8), we too may be accused of intellectual insanity. Whatever happens to us, whatever the opposition and negativity, will we continue to sing with joyful and assured hearts?

*No more we doubt thee glorious Prince of life.
Life is nought without Thee, aid us in our strife.
Make us more than conquerors through thy deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordon to thy home above:
Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won. (Edmund Budry)*

The great Augustine wrote this about Thomas: "He doubted so that we don't have to".

As Jesus said to Thomas: "Stop doubting and believe!"

You and I really have *no excuse* for unbelief.

But what does it say? "The word is *near you*; it is in your mouth and in your heart", that is, the *word of faith we are now proclaiming*: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (Romans 10 v 8-10)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Amen!