

## St Thomas the Apostle 3rd July 2016

C: Today the Church remembers St Thomas' – doubting Thomas – but how much do we really know about him?

B: He was one of the twelve apostles.

T: He asked questions, and he doubted the resurrection because he hadn't seen it with his own eyes.

B: And his other name was Didymus, meaning "twin".

C: I didn't know that Bill. Hmm. Am I right in thinking you have a twin?

I wonder, what does it feel like to have another person in the world who's identical to you? Can you read each other's minds? I don't know! Does having a twin make you feel more secure? Please, tell me more...

B: "Interestingly, brother and I followed the same pattern of schooling up to our 'O' levels. We took the same 9 exams and passed the same 9. Not until we were 16 did our learning patterns change. We often seem to be in tune – perhaps phoning, or, more recently, face timing each other at the same time – a bit uncanny. He's a great friend whom I can trust completely. We are both Readers in the C of E so we share the Christian Faith – that's also important to us."

T: I'm wondering if Thomas was feeling very alone and out of the loop. All of the others were sharing something amazing that he hadn't been part of. And he was used to sharing everything.

C: Yes indeed. I regard faith as something that can only really be expressed and felt in community, particularly a church community such as this one of St. David.

Saying the Creed together feels like we are supporting each other and sharing the experience of believing in Jesus. My faith is rooted in community, rooted with other people; this helps me feel at peace.

B: I wonder what other people think. Is your faith strengthened by being together here? *Turn to congregation.*

T: Or by other close relationships, friends, partner who share your faith? It makes me realise how important it is to talk about your faith to someone else who knows you well.

C: Moving on to another question, a big question: What's the difference between belief, faith and trust? *[turn to congregation]* I invite you all to ponder which word best describes what's happening in your hearts and minds towards God?

B: The Greek word which has been translated as doubting is more like “unbelieving”. Is there a difference between doubt and unbelief?

T: Not wishing to be too technical, but I’ve recently read a book by Marcus Borg, who says that belief is very closely related to the word for love. Believing in God is more like believing God than accepting a doctrinal statement. It’s a relationship.

C: Yes, a relationship in which God always takes the initiative - God’s faith in us comes first. Our faith in God is secondary, a response to God’s first love of us.

We are fearfully and wonderfully made in the womb: there God has known us first and loved us first. The faith we have is a resonate echo of God deep within us. In Jesus Christ, God has taken the initiative supreme.

B: But surely the actual beliefs that we have are important. *Turning to congregation* I wonder which beliefs are most central to your faith. Is it mainly a matter of belief or is there a sense that God has come looking for you?

What about you two? *addressing C and T* Is your Christian faith about believing certain things, or behaving in a certain way, or belonging to a certain group which gives you a place to feel secure and loved

T: For me the idea of trust is really important. If I say to someone, “I believe in you”, it means “I trust in you to be there and be on my side.” I believe that God is the creative and benevolent and healing presence that sustains the world. And that feels like a personal care for me and for us.

C: For me, faith doesn’t wholly reside in the head or in the heart or in the body. We cannot separate ourselves out like that. Our identity is wholeness of body, spirit and mind.

B: What part does the body play in faith Christopher?

C: Let’s focus on St. Thomas again. He said: “Unless I put my finger in the marks of the nails and put my hand in his side, I will not believe this has happened.” St. Thomas needed not only to touch Jesus to have faith, but to hide his mortal body inside Jesus’ mortal wounds.

T: It’s a shockingly physical and intimate image, isn’t it?

C: Yes! It shocked people then, and it does now. All our senses are important in our relationship with the world around us. And that is why I love the rich sensory nature of liturgy, I love all the ways the Church offers us to touch God through sacramental sight, sound, and smell! In

our touching - mouth to bread, lips to chalice - we can receive God.

B: Our bodies are vulnerable, imperfect and ageing and faith is making yourself vulnerable. If we surrender to God's way for our lives that may involve giving up our cherished idea of ourselves. But surrender also means casting all your care and anxiety onto God. Jesus said, "come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

T: Yes I love that idea of simply resting in the kindly arms of God. But I also tend to be full of angst because there are some things I can't believe. So can I now move us on to doubt? I don't think doubt is the opposite of faith. I think that faith and doubt are two sides of the same coin. The opposite of faith is certainty.

B: If you're certain of every article of your belief, that doesn't leave any room for listening to other insights, does it? Whereas doubt is creative, open to looking at things in a different way. It's moving forwards in your faith.

C: I think doubt is not militant scepticism, nor is doubt a convinced rejection of faith; doubt is an exploration and

questioning of faith. After all, doubt is something the Church has been doing for since St. Thomas!

I really value orthodoxy, which is the teaching of the Church, because this faith, handed down to us today in the Creed for example, has been formed and refined by thousands of years of doubt. The doubts of generations of God's people encourage us to trust in God; to trust that God is big enough to contain all our questions, all our doubts, and all our fears.

Our honesty, or anxiety, or scrutiny cannot break our God whose steadfast faith is everlasting.