

The Address

If you have a garden I'm sure that you will have taken advantage of the good weather over the past weeks to tidy it up and plant it. In our garden I look after the vegetable patch and this year I had more opportunity than usual to dig it over and add some compost. We know what makes for a good crop, well prepared and nourished soil, rain and warmth, good quality seeds and a willingness to keep the weeds at bay? And it's very rewarding when we do get a good crop and can enjoy fresh food with zero food miles. Yet I don't fully understand how the seed becomes a plant and I certainly can't see the process of the cells dividing and multiplying in the growth process. But that doesn't stop me planting the seeds or sets. I do so trusting what will happen.

One of the other activities of recent weeks has been getting to grips with new technology. I have been learning about live streaming and what happens when you inadvertently turn your phone around during a Good Friday liturgy. I'll leave you to check that one out if you haven't seen it! And like many others I've been learning to use the Zoom which allows virtual gatherings with everyone sitting in their own homes or offices. I don't fully understand how the technology works for either of these marvels, but it doesn't stop me using them. I just have to trust that this clever software will work.

Meanwhile, back in St John's gospel, we are hearing the wonderful accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances. His disciples were not just convinced in their heads that Jesus was alive again. Their hearts were filled with joy, peace and a sense of forgiveness when they heard the words of Jesus.

But Thomas wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus showed them his hands and his side. He refused to believe that Jesus was alive again. He needed physical proof.

Then a week later, when the disciples were together again, this time including Thomas, Jesus entered into the closed room and greeted them with the words 'Peace be with you'. Without even being asked Jesus invited Thomas to touch his hands and side to assure himself that this was really the Jesus he had followed, the Jesus who had died on the cross and been pierced with a spear. As Thomas touches the wounds he utters words that are the climax of St John's Gospel 'My Lord and my God'.

Jesus saw his need and allowed him the physical evidence which he needed. Thomas in turn was filled with faith and love. He didn't need to ask any further questions but accepted Jesus as his Lord and ultimately, we believe, gave up his life as a witness to the resurrection.

But Jesus, and St John, knew that Thomas was one of the few for whom such physical proof would be available. Jesus said 'Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe'. And those people include all of us. For

none of us have seen, or can see in this world, such evidence of the resurrection. But like the disciples we can know the joy, peace and forgiveness which Jesus brings.

There are many things that most of us can't fully explain or understand whether it's the growth of crops or the working of the internet. Still less can we explain why people love us or why we sometimes experience a vivid sense of divine presence. And none of us can fully explain what happened when Jesus rose from the dead. Yet we do have the transformation of the lives of the original disciples and of many millions of subsequent believers to guide and inspire us in our faith. We shouldn't apologise that belief in the resurrection requires an act of faith. But we should ask what difference the resurrection makes in our lives, in mine and in yours? How are our lives being transformed and how can we guide and inspire others in their faith.

One thing we do understand is that our faith becomes stronger when we express it and use it to serve others. The resurrection will transform each of us in a different way but we will always be able to tell if that transformation is from God if we are growing in faith, hope and love. And this present crisis give us many opportunities for this: our care for those around us, our faithfulness in prayer, our confidence that God is working through these dreadful circumstances to bring renewal and grace to the world, just as in the death of resurrection of Jesus. 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe'. Jesus did not judge Thomas for his lack of faith and he will not judge us either. Faith is sometimes hard to cling onto. But if we are open to him he will provide the means to strengthen our faith, however weak it may feel, and to know more deeply his risen life within us.