

## Address by Belinda Speed-Andrews for 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2022

Before I begin I would like to say to everyone here, that if there is anything I say this morning which stirs something up for you and you would like to talk this through, please do let me, or Nigel or Ash know, either during coffee after the service or outside of the Church context.

And now you are all thinking, oh my goodness what is Belinda going to deliver today! Well what I hope I am going to say is open, and honest and relevant to more people here than perhaps we each recognise.

St Thomas.

St Thomas, an apostle of Christ.

St Thomas the Doubter.

St Thomas, the only openly honest apostle. The one who asked the difficult challenging questions everyone else was thinking but didn't like to ask.

I believe that St Thomas speaks to a great many people today, because he wasn't scared to say, I will only believe if I see with my eyes. And there is the rub for us. St Thomas had the privilege of seeing with his own eyes, the open, gaping wounds in the hands and feet of Jesus and the hole in his side.

Let's take a step back before we move forward.

So where was Thomas, when Jesus first appeared to the disciples in the upper room? Why wasn't Thomas there too? The other 10 were together consoling one another, questioning what had just happened, trying to make sense of the last three years and one of them was missing.

Perhaps Thomas was of the Myers Briggs Personality Type that likes to work things out on their own, for themselves? Someone who can't stand all the chatter and the talking over each other and worries when someone says something that he feels he should be feeling or thinking and has a rush of guilt because he doesn't.

My thoughts. Thomas was on Golgotha, where everything had come to an end. At the place where his friend, his best friend, the man he had declared earlier in John's Gospel, that he would go and die with when news of Lazarus' death came to them all; 'Let us also go, that we may die with him', had just been killed in the most humiliating, and painful way one can imagine. And the reality? Jesus had died but Thomas hadn't. Perhaps Thomas had the beginnings of survivor's guilt? Maybe. But whatever it was Thomas was there and not in the Upper room.

In the only place in the New Testament, we have the phrase, 'a week later'. A week later Thomas was in the Upper room with his friends. But for a whole week was Thomas on Golgotha every day, praying and crying and praying some more and doubting everything he had seen and witnessed over the last three years? And if he was, is that a bad thing? Does it make his faith any less for it?

And perhaps that is the nub of this reading this morning for us. Why are we so scared of doubt? Why do we feel guilty when we question what we think we ought to believe? And so what do we do, we bury the doubt deep inside ourselves hoping above hope that the lid of that particular box never opens, ever again? Why? Because to have any feelings of doubt on questions of faith is deeply deeply uncomfortable, deeply painful and deeply wounding and we don't want anyone else to know that that is where we are. Because when we doubt, perhaps it feels as if we are questioning God himself, and how dare we question God. Dare we?

But isn't that what Thomas did? He was questioning everything and refused to believe until he saw Jesus for himself, with the wounds in his hands, and his feet, and his side. If only, if only I could reach out and touch those wounds too.

But what is it that causes us to doubt? Our own doubt may not be questions of faith; it may be about something completely different, but when we do doubt it is often of a very personal nature. Perhaps it is words written or words spoken that once we have read them or heard them we can't unread or unhear any of them. And those words are like an insidious disease that whittles its way to the core of who we are and causes us to doubt. The doubts go deep inside us, deep into the very core of who we are; unhelpful most of the time. And for most of the time we are ok, but when pandoras box is re-opened, those doubts come flooding back in.

To doubt, to acknowledge that we doubt, that we have doubts, to ourselves and then to openly say we have doubts, of whatever nature they may be, to say those words out loud, that is the beginning of a journey of discovery. David Runcorn, +Jackie's husband, talks about leaning into those doubts, acknowledging them, bringing them out in the open; facing the uncomfortable reality, a bit like my daughter a few years ago, when she acknowledged that it was sprout season again and to the one sole sprout on her plate, said; 'hello sprout we meet again!'

So was Thomas visiting Golgotha every day that week before he met with Jesus in the Upper room? Was he there every day begging God, begging Jesus to show up? Saying, crying, pleading with Jesus; 'I need you to show up now. I need to know, I need to see; I need to see the wounds, to touch them, to feel them'. And Jesus did show up. He showed up as Thomas last knew him, embodied with the wounds in his

hands, and feet, and sides. Gently inviting Thomas to reach out and touch. Reach out and touch, I am here, now and always. And Thomas knew that everything he had witnessed and heard and questioned was true. 'I am the way, the truth and the life'.

Jesus turned up. Not like the proverbial bad penny but like the gold repair in the Japanese art of kintsugi. A flash of brilliance, affirming, confirming, beautiful. But what you notice about the gold is that it doesn't obscure or cover up the break; the break is still clear in the way the gold is placed over the break. And likewise, Jesus, the gold in our lives, he doesn't cover up or hide our flaws, our doubts, our lack of understanding but he comes alongside us and invites us to reach out and touch; we are still who we are with all of our doubts, but Jesus is the gold. He knows. He understands. He doesn't condemn. But he invites Thomas, he invites each of us to reach out and touch. For in the reaching out and touching Jesus redeems and transforms us.

I want to finish with words from Malcolm Guite:

In this sacrament of Holy Communion, Jesus Christ invites every single one of us with just the same invitation he gave to Thomas; reach out your hand, touch my wounds, put your hand in my side. And in this moment Jesus says, I'm going to put into your hands the heart of who I am, even in my brokenness, in the broken bread and in the blood I shed in the wine outpoured. And in this service of Holy Communion, we go one step further, having heard that invitation from Christ to reach and touch his wounds we turn to him in this service and say please Christ reach out to me, to us through the hands of my fellow Christians as they are laid on me, reach out and touch my wounds too, for by your stripes I am healed'. Amen.