

Sunday 3rd July 2022
St Thomas

Liverpool Parish Church

Evensong

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I have a soft spot for Thomas. He has become associated with doubt but he was a man in search of certainty. Famously not believing that Jesus had visited the apostles in the locked room, he wanted proof. The dead do not rise, ghosts do not exist, anyone could be trying to trick the followers of Jesus and ridicule them for their belief.

No, Thomas wanted certainty and we know from John's gospel that he indeed was given it, as he placed his finger in Jesus' wounded hand and his hand in the open side of the risen Christ. Thomas exhibited the same literal approach when Jesus has previously said to the disciples. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas's challenging response was Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' His mind was set on the definitions of this world while Jesus spoke of the spiritual world. Thomas was looking for details to input into a sat nav, Jesus was speaking of the route to the kingdom of God with these profound words 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Thomas who wanted to deal in certainty and clear evidence was challenged to live in faith. If we look for concrete proof to illustrate beyond doubt that God exists, we will be disappointed. There is no mathematical equation, no photographic testimony or forensic confirmation that would stand up in a court of law or convince the likes of Richard Dawkins to show beyond doubt that God exists.

We just know through faith that God is indeed real and at work in our lives and the wider world.

Sitting in his ash pit, surrounded by the tattered remains of his once rich and profitable life, Job too

reached that conclusion. The devil had supposedly had a bet with God that the disastrous loss of all that he held precious would convince Job that there was no God. But Job came to see that despite everything, God does exist and has the power and right to treat us as he wishes. We, like Job, fool ourselves if we think that we can challenge God and thwart his plans unless he chooses to let us succeed. I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' God, of course, had pity on him and restored his life to him, once he had learnt this powerful lesson, the same lesson that Thomas had to learn. But through Thomas's demand for proof of the risen Christ, we have these consoling words of Jesus. Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. These same words are echoed by Peter in his first letter. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy. Through Thomas's search for certainty, we are encouraged in our faith. We can live our lives in the freedom of the knowledge that God exists. We know in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit that we are loved because the Father did not spare his only Son for our sakes. Each one of us can show that God is at work in our lives, that no detail is too trivial for him to involve himself in. We believe that even in the darkest of times when there may be suffering and outrage, God walks with us. And though like Job, we may rant and rage and try to turn our backs on God, he will not abandon his own.

So we have much to thank Thomas for his questioning. By his probing and Jesus' response we are affirmed in our faith and encouraged in our journey in the Way to the Truth and the Life of the kingdom of God. Amen.

Revd Michelle Montrose