

**Sunday 27 April 2025**  
**The Second Sunday of Easter**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**NT: Acts 5.27-32**

**NT: Revelation 1.4-8**

**Gp: John 20:19-31**

I wonder how you characterise the disciple in the centre of our Gospel reading Thomas, the Thomas who was the first 'Doubting Thomas'. The term 'doubting Thomas' has evolved to refer to anyone who is hesitant to believe or accepts something without concrete evidence. It's a way of describing someone who is skeptical, questioning, or unwilling to believe something without direct proof or experience. You might hear someone described as a 'doubting Thomas' when they are resistant to a new idea, a claim, or a piece of information, especially if it seems to go against their expectations or beliefs.

While 'doubting Thomas' is often used negatively, it's worth noting that Thomas' doubts ultimately led him to a stronger faith. His willingness to question and seek evidence, rather than blindly accepting claims, can be seen as a positive trait in some contexts. It's only in John's gospel that we hear about Thomas. In John 11, the other disciples tried to talk Jesus out of going to Bethany when Lazarus died. Jesus said, *"Let us go to Judea again."* but the disciples said to him, *"Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?"* Thomas seemed the bravest by saying, *"Let us also go, that we may die with Him."* Let's give Thomas some credit! He was willing to die for Jesus. His words may have been pessimistic or even filled with false courage, but he was thinking the right thoughts. Ultimately, all but the apostle John would die for Jesus' sake.

We see Thomas again in the upper room when Jesus explained to his disciples that He was going away. Thomas, still willing to go with Him anywhere, was the only one to ask, *"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"* Then Jesus replied with that wonderful verse, *"I AM the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

When Thomas said he would follow Jesus anywhere, little did he know his words would come true! Church tradition and history tells us that Thomas traveled outside the Roman Empire to Persia and India. The ancient Silk Road was well traveled, and the southern route went all the way to India. He became a bold evangelist and church planter. It is believed he arrived in India no later than 49 AD. There is some evidence that he made it all the way to China.

Regardless, Thomas became a faithful, fearless witness, spending his life spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. History tells us he died by the sword in southern India, near Madras. The irony is that Thomas touched Jesus side where the sword pierced Him, and he suffered the same fate! Doubt turned to belief through faith and the experience of the risen Christ.

That is the pattern in today's Gospel reading. Again, remember what has gone before. The disciples have seen the power of Jesus, teaching, healing, even raising the dead. They have heard, from Mary Magdalene, about the resurrection. Yet somehow, they are still sitting huddled behind locked doors, frightened and self-pitying. And God responds with patient humour, and a demonstration that should satisfy even the most hardened doubter.

Into the locked room steps Jesus, whom the disciples had last seen dying in agony. He is clearly the same man; he makes a point of showing them his wounds. He also breathes on them, just in case they should begin to suspect that he was not alive but some kind of ghost. If the disciples had been able to imagine a conversation with Jesus after his crucifixion, how would it have gone? Where were you when I needed you? perhaps? Or even, didn't you listen to a word I was saying all those years? But there is no mention of the past here. Instead, those who had earned judgement are given the task of judging others; those who had doubted God's power and his promises are given the living, abiding presence of God in the Holy Spirit. But even that is not enough.

Thomas chooses not to believe the combined witness of his friends. He is unconvinced both by their words and by their sudden transformation from defeat to glowing joy. So, just for Thomas, here is the full, unmistakable, physical presence of the crucified and risen Lord. Satisfied, Thomas? Can you manage now to be Convinced Thomas, rather than Doubting Thomas?

Today's passage from Acts suggests that some, at least, of the disciples managed to hold on to their certainty, and never to tire of explaining to others what had been so very hard for them to understand. Can this really be the same Peter, who had been so anxious to distance himself from Jesus at the crucifixion? Yet here he is, suddenly unafraid of arrest and imprisonment. In fact, he is being thoroughly cheeky to the council. "*We're the law-abiding ones,*" he says, "*you're the ones who ought to be tried, for misunderstanding our God and killing Jesus?*" But Peter has learned enough about himself to be humble in his witness, too. He knows that it is, ultimately, the presence of the Holy Spirit that guarantees the truth of what he is saying.

Although you would think that we have seen more than enough of the power of God to convince us forever, today's readings suggest otherwise. We will sometimes remember and trust, and sometimes forget and doubt. We will sometimes be able to speak with strength and conviction of all that God has done for us in Christ, and sometimes we will panic and stutter. That is why the real witness to the resurrection power of God is God himself. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Life-giver, the gift to us of God's continuing presence with us, carries on the job of bearing witness to the crucified and risen Christ, quietly and inexorably. God, in his humour and grace, asks us to join in, to tell what we have seen and heard. We can give our testimonies, however feeble, and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to make God present. And how do we do that?

Firstly, we need to consider how we are. Are we locked in a room? Do we know others who are locked in a room, either individually, or wider as a church? Secondly, how are we remembering and perceiving God in these current situations? As we draw close to look upon the pierced Christ, we are close enough to feel He is breathing on us and flooding us with His forgiveness, mercy and grace. Our faith thus increases and the Spirit comforts, guides and empowers us so that we do not live in our own strength.

Finally, the purpose and application of this is to be involved and engaged with the communities around us, in which there are the lives of many who do not yet know the Gospel. We respond to them with loving service, walking alongside them and sharing Jesus with every step. Many of us have doubts about our faith, faith for me has to be a continuing process, as I believe that we must all strive to grow and strengthen our Christian faith or belief.

Doubt can make our faith deeper and stronger, and we are blessed and saved by God, without seeing a physical Jesus. Over the centuries many have struggled with belief, Augustine writing in the 4<sup>th</sup> century about how he speaks to God and his experience. Augustine writes

*'You called me, you cried aloud to me, you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me, your radiance enveloped me, you put my blindness to flight. You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and now I gasp for your sweet odour. I tasted you and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me and I am inflamed with love of your peace.'*

God will meet you, as he did with Thomas and Augustine and many others, when we have doubt. But if we have doubts the final part of our Gospel reading also highlights what we have in our doubts. It's the summary of the purpose of John's gospel, and John writes: Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

These scriptures were written – especially these four gospels, the stories of Jesus' time here on Earth – so that we may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that through believing we may have life. Because of Jesus, because of all that he did in his time on Earth, and in particular what he did over the course of these three days – from the cross, to standing amongst the disciples. Because of him, we can have life, we can have joy, we can have peace. So, as I say again peace be with you – I pray that we will know God's peace amongst us as we believe in him and know the joy of his resurrection.

**Fr Bill Addy**