

Acts 5:27-32 & John 20:19-31 Thomas: Say what you see

Do you remember those games where the trick was to “say what you see”? There used to be cards with drawings on and then when the age of television arrived, the format was very successfully converted into the programme “Catchphrase.” If you wanted to succeed, all you had to do was “say what you see”.

But this morning, as we conclude our series on characters around the Cross of Christ we come to Thomas, sceptical, incredulous, doubting Thomas, but even he came to say what he saw.

Now, maybe Thomas was a little like the customer at a certain restaurant. The waitress there was a friendly soul, who felt sorry for the woman she was serving. As the customer ate she appeared dour, depressed and dejected and because she herself ate in the restaurant after her shift had finished, the waitress knew that the food was delicious. So at the end of the meal, as the woman paid her bill, the waitress thanked her and said gently, “Have a nice day.”

But without really listening, the customer snappily replied, “I’m sorry, but I’ve made other plans.”

Well, Thomas is the sort of person who plans to have a not very good day isn’t he? He is convinced that life is going to turn out badly. In John 11 when Jesus decides to go to Lazarus who is ill the disciples try to talk him out of it, “But Rabbi, they said, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?”

However, when Jesus clearly cannot be persuaded otherwise Thomas commits himself to doom and gloom in verse 16;

“Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

“Have a nice day.”

“I’m sorry, but I’ve made other plans.”

And you know, I just think this is Thomas’ basic personality trait – he is a pessimist, a real “glass-half-empty kind of person because at the Last Supper when Jesus is comforting his disciples and saying to them, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas is the one who pipes up, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” (John 14:5)

Now, fortunately for us Jesus answers Thomas with that wonderful assurance that he; Jesus, is the way, the truth and the life and that no-one comes to the Father except through him, but really Thomas must have been quite wearing to have around – a real Eeyore.

But in some ways Thomas is good for us too, he reminds us that for some people – for many people - faith is a difficult thing. Most people can't instantly believe in Jesus, it takes time and hard work, commitment and love from those around to lead them into genuine faith.

But if you are a sceptical person, then Thomas can also help you to believe.

Perhaps Thomas is best known for the events in the passage from John's Gospel which was read to us earlier, where Thomas misses out on meeting the risen Lord Jesus and won't believe he is alive until he gets solid, empirical proof.

But here is the first thing to learn – don't cut your self off.

Look again at John 20, "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you!"

Now who are gathered together? Answer; The Disciples, except (we discover later) for Thomas. Now, what do you think was Thomas' excuse? What was so important that it kept him from meeting with the other disciples the day Jesus' tomb had been discovered empty?

Was his tax return due? Was his wife in labour? No, Thomas had cut himself off to sink into a hopeless depression, to nurse his darkest fears in the fertile ground of solitude. Meanwhile, on the other side of town the rest of the disciples are encountering the risen Christ, receiving the Holy Spirit and generally having their world turned joyfully upside down.

Historically today is known as "Low Sunday", I don't think that it is the reason, but I like to think that (in common with the Sunday after Christmas) we can call today "low Sunday" because we tend to be pretty "low" on numbers in church. We're all a bit "churched out" after Easter, so we go off and do something else. Actually with our busy lives we tend to find less a less time to attend church the rest of the year.

Did you know that a regular church attendee is now someone who makes it every fortnight?

Well, look what Thomas missed by not going to church! The Risen Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, peace, joy, support, fellowship...need I go on? It's no wonder the writer of Hebrews says, "let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing." (Heb 10:25)

So if you are struggling, if you have questions about the risen Christ, then keep coming to the fellowship of believers, keep meeting with the other disciples and keep asking questions – last week we gave away a book at St. Andrew's called "The Case for Easter" Which answers many of the questions about the death and resurrection of Jesus

If you weren't there, you won't have got one, but, you're here today and so now you know it exists and you also know who's got a copy to lend you. Don't give up meeting together.

And then, if you are still sceptical – be open. Look what Thomas does, he thinks that he is shutting down the foolish conversation of others, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." Case closed!

If you've got questions about Christianity, or Jesus then that's great, it means that you are thinking things through properly, but don't ever set the bar deliberately to a height where you think it can't be cleared with the conscious intent to carry on in your scepticism.

And so, I suppose that we have to give Thomas credit that a week later, when once again all the disciples were gathered in the upper room, at least this time he was with them. And to his shock and his amazement Jesus - the risen Jesus, the alive Jesus is suddenly in front of him.

And, Oh! How embarrassed Thomas must have felt for a moment because Jesus turns to him and says, “Thomas, Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Now, Jesus doesn't set out to embarrass Thomas, he's achieved that perfectly well himself, what Jesus does is simply and kindly tell his friend to believe the evidence for the resurrection. You see, now all that Thomas has to do is “Say what he Sees” and that exactly what he does, he declares; “My Lord and my God!”

Now, listen, we won't get the opportunity Thomas did, Jesus doesn't just turn up on demand to show us his scars, through Thomas Jesus wanted to make the point that there is enough reason for us to believe without needing to put our finger or hands into the scars on his body. The evidence was already there; the Old Testament prophecies, his teaching, the eyewitness accounts and all that evidence is there for us too.

I suspect that many of us are sceptical about something to do with Christianity, maybe some of you here are really struggling to believe, but faith isn't about mindless trust, God has given us clear evidence and his Holy Spirit to help us to asses and understand it.

Jesus told Thomas that he was blessed because his doubts were quashed with the physical presence of Christ, but he added; “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Do you think that it is any coincidence that John then instantly adds; “Jesus did many other miraculous 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 Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”?

Of course not. Thomas demanded an unreasonable sign and in his love Jesus gave him the opportunity to have it – but seeing was enough for Thomas to declare, “My Lord and my God!” We are perfectly entitled to demand fair evidence for Jesus’ resurrection too and God has lovingly given it to us here “so that by believing [we might] have life in [Jesus] name.”

Do you struggle to understand the resurrection? Then read the evidence and borrow that book from someone at Alwalton and then, like the father who brought his son to Jesus to be healed, ask Jesus for help, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” so that we too maybe able to say what we see revealed to us in Scripture; “My Lord and my God!” Amen.