

Hello From Rev Barb

Lectionary readings: Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9 and John 20:19-31

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

How are you going in this time of enforced separation and limitation? I wonder how you experienced Easter this year, compared with all the Easters of your past. Are you finding it difficult not being able to gather in worship and, in particular, not being able to participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion? We are enduring an unforeseen and unprecedented challenge that is testing us all.

The Season of Easter is not over, but continues until Pentecost Sunday, 31st May. Up until then, the Scripture passages in our lectionary invite us to look deeply at the meaning of Jesus' resurrection.

This week, John's Gospel gives us the story of Thomas. We know it well. We can picture the scene where the disciples are meeting in a locked room, fearful and despondent, except that is, for Thomas, and Jesus appears to them.

We are very familiar with this story. But, because we think we know it so well, perhaps what we take for granted, or what we have assumed, can be a barrier to our understanding. Perhaps we need to forget some of our preconceptions, to hear the Good News that is being presented.

How often have you heard the expression "Doubting Thomas"? Do you believe this is a key characteristic of Thomas? But, is it authentic to be seen as a doubter, when just seeking more evidence? Several writers have pointed out that Thomas is never described in John's Gospel as a doubter, but as a *twin*.

In John 20:20, John says that when Jesus showed the disciples his hands and his side, **they** rejoiced because they had *seen the Lord*. Thomas was only asking for what the others had already received. Was it reasonable to expect him to believe his Lord was alive, simply hearing them say so? After all, he had just seen Jesus nailed to the cross and die. Is it fair to portray Thomas, as he often has been, as an inferior disciple?

Do you think Thomas is 'told off' by Jesus (John 20:29) for his lack of faith? Some scholars have suggested that Jesus' words may not have been about Thomas at all, but spoken for all the disciples then, and continuing right through until now. That is, they may have been for **us**. For *you* and *me*. Jesus said that all are "*blessed*", who have not seen and yet have come to believe. Far from a rebuke to Thomas, these words can be seen as Jesus blessing all the disciples who come to believe in him, through all the ages. That is Good News, indeed!



Thomas may have been sceptical, but once he encountered Jesus, he didn't hesitate. He acted. He didn't merely believe, but makes the chief confession in John's gospel, acclaiming Jesus as 'My Lord and my God!'. If we think Thomas has received a bad rap, maybe we can view him with fresh eyes, even as a model of how to come to faith.

So, what of ourselves, any of us who resonate with Thomas? It is not only ok for each of us to bring our own questions, our scepticism, our growing understandings, our partial insights to our Christian lives, but our questioning and grappling with the things that we don't understand leads to having a robust and authentic faith.

We are not told anything else about Thomas' twin. Could it be each one of us, as we wait to know for sure, as we ask our questions all along our journeys, and as we finally, physically and spiritually encounter the living Christ?

May you be blessed as, in Christ, you journey through this strange and daunting time. Christ is risen and lives within us and amongst us! We are truly *blessed*! Hallelujah!