

John 20:24-29

If you were an animal I wonder what animal you would be? Would you be a lion, proud and strong the King of the jungle? Or a dormouse, small, quiet and inoffensive? Would you be a panther sleek lithe and quick? Or a possum slow sleepy and lethargic?

What about a character from the Bible? Who would you be, Paul faithful, courageous and committed? Or Timothy anxious, somewhat timid but wanting to be a follower? Would you be Noah good, true and not swayed by popular opinion? Or Jonah scared, complaining and on the run?

Well these are interesting exercises and perhaps our answers reveal a bit about how we see ourselves or how we think others see us. Let me just ask one more, which of the 12 disciples do you see yourself like? Peter bold but hasty, Andrew keen to bring others to Jesus, Matthew wanting all his friends to know Jesus, John who loved Jesus deeply?

I have a sneaking suspicion that many of us would say no to all of those and yes to the name of Thomas who is always known as doubting Thomas. Many of us can identify with Thomas because we don't find faith easy and we don't see ourselves as confident believers.

On this first Sunday after Easter it is apposite to look at Thomas. Indeed, because of the nature of his path to faith, it is always good to look at him. So let's have a look at this passage in John 20.

It is a very honest passage. I mean this is not something that Thomas would have wanted on his CV is it?

1. A missed opportunity.

V24, "Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came."

Thomas hadn't been there when late on that first Easter day Jesus had come and stood among his disciples in the upper room. The other ten saw Jesus risen from the dead but Thomas wasn't there and missed it. Whenever I think of missing out I think of Pete Best. Pete Best was the drummer with the Beatles until he was sacked in 1962 in favour of Ringo Starr. Just think what he missed out on!

Well Thomas missed out. We're not told why he wasn't there simply that he wasn't. But see what he missed out on, the risen Lord Jesus. What a thing to miss. Surely this was a bigger thing to miss than being drummer to the Beatles - a missed opportunity. I remember one Friday I was at Teacher Training college and was told there was a phone call for me. When I got to the phone I found it was the Secretary at Egham Town Football Club they needed someone to play full back for Egham Town the next day could I do it. Having had a trial for Wimbledon I suppose they

thought I was good enough. I turned the opportunity down because I was due to play for the College the following day and didn't want to let them down. But I still wonder what if... you do don't you? For the next seven days I should think Thomas was saying to himself, "if only" – a missed opportunity. When it comes to faith, opportunities come along and we need to grab them. I have heard parents say of children I won't take them to Sunday school I'll let them make up their own minds later. I have heard adults say I'm too busy to think about faith I'll get round to it later. Perhaps you are listening to this on a download and if that is part of your thinking let me encourage you not to leave it till later.

2. A refusal to believe.

Thomas missed out and the others lost no time in telling him what he had missed out on, v25 "So the other disciples told him, "we have seen the Lord!""

But then comes the part that gave Thomas his nickname for Thomas stoutly refused to accept what they said, "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."

I will not believe. Here were ten friends. Men whom he'd lived with and trusted and yet when they tell him what they have seen he refused to accept it. It is here where many of us find our connection with Thomas for we too find it hard to believe.

I can remember a time when I could not believe in miracles and was very firm in my unbelief. In the same way Thomas seems unshakeable in his unbelief.

I was speaking to a friend earlier in the week and he said he had made a dough mountain with three of his children and acted out the crucifixion putting three crosses on the mountain and the resurrection with some little figures and a cave in the dough. He said that during the week the children had asked him "what's happening now?" His reply was that the ten were still arguing with Thomas trying to help him believe. His next comment was interesting – a week is a long time! Thomas was resolute in his unbelief. Perhaps you can think of that from your own life.

Some of us may have had a time in our life where we refused to believe. Perhaps some are there at the moment. We may come to church we may even come regularly it doesn't mean we believe. Thomas was there. He had probably met the 10 through the week and yet here he was still refusing to believe.

3. A compassionate Lord.

So it is that, v26, a week later the disciples were all together in the Upper Room and this time Thomas was with them. Then Jesus again came and stood with them and v27 spoke to Thomas offering his body to be touched by Thomas. Note what we have here is no ghost or spirit this is a physical resurrection. But the main point is that Jesus knew. He clearly knew what Thomas had

said and so he offered his hands and side for examination. He knew Thomas and his doubt. Actually while the word we have here is doubt what Jesus said to him was do not disbelieve but believe. Jesus showed a compassion for Thomas and came again to the upper room because he wanted Thomas to believe. His call to Thomas was to put away his unbelief and instead to believe. Thomas mattered to Jesus. Here we see the good shepherd in action. The ten might believe but the one mattered. Such was the care of Jesus for Thomas.

How compassionate, caring and patient Jesus was with Thomas and indeed is with us. I have seen it over and over again with people as they come to faith. I may pray for them, speak with them, go through the gospel with them answer questions and so on and they still don't seem to get it. I get impatient wondering what on earth is stopping them coming to faith. I wonder if the other 10 got a bit fed up with Thomas' refusal to believe? However, Jesus shows the compassion and patience I so often lack. He offered Thomas the proof that Thomas said he needed.

4. A remarkable change

The effect on Thomas was dramatic and remarkable v28, "Thomas answered him, "my Lord and my God." It was a statement of faith and an act of worship. Thomas's doubt had melted away in an instance. No longer doubting Thomas but believing Thomas. But Jesus v29 rebuked him for his demand and pronounced a blessing on those who believe without seeing as Thomas had. And in so doing he teaches us a lesson about belief.

There are two main ways in which we believe something. The first is through our own empirical observation and the second is through the testimony of reliable and credible witnesses.

The earth is round we know that but it was only when astronauts went into space could they see that the earth is round and confirm what was accepted. Their empirical evidence affirmed what credible Scientists had told us.

Thomas saw and believed. We today are not privileged as Thomas was and we have to believe on the basis of the testimony of those who did see Jesus risen from the dead.

If we were all like Thomas then there would be no church today. However we are here because we have heard rather than seen. As we can see from v31 that is why this gospel has been set down so that those of us who are not privileged to believe on the basis of what we see and touch can believe on the testimony of those who saw and who bear reliable and credible witness to what they saw. This is what John said at the beginning of 1 John 1:1-3, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so

that you also may have fellowship with us.” They bear testimony so that we can believe. Friends this is helpful to us in three ways.

Firstly for any who have not come to faith and find themselves where Thomas was it tells you that there is good evidence on which to believe, the testimony of those who saw Jesus crucified dead and buried but who then also saw him resurrected and alive. Please let me urge you if you find yourself here today unbelieving then look at the gospels read them talk to a friend about them but in the words of Jesus “don’t disbelieve but believe”.

Secondly it reminds us that our faith grows as we read the Bible and as we hear the testimony of those who saw and lived with Jesus. Of course we wobble, we are human and we live in a very secular world, a world which does not believe and such causes us to question our belief so we need to read God’s word to be reminded and refocused by that word.

But thirdly it reminds us that if we have friends whom we are seeking to help come to faith then it is not so much our testimony but the testimony of the disciples that we should be pointing people to.

Last Sunday as part of our quiz at the 10.30 Easter Service I said that Kettering Town have scored most goals in the history of the FA cup and at the end of the service a few people came up to me and said “are you sure” in others words could they believe me? I said that it had been on the BBC website just that week. That was Ok the website was seen as reliable and trustworthy.

So, just as Thomas effectively was saying to Peter ,when he came up to him and said “I have seen Jesus”, “I don’t believe **YOU!**”, your friend when you tell them about faith may say “I don’t believe you.”

So we too need to appeal to other evidence and to reliable sources and especially to the Bible. In Romans 10:17 we read, “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ”. We need to point people to a testimony that is more reliable than ourselves and that is the testimony of those who did see Jesus risen from the dead. We need to point people to the disciples and their testimony in the Bible.

John 20:31, “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.”

Yes what God has done for us is important and for our friends it may be that which draws them to Jesus. They may see you or I and think I want what he or she has got. Also it is good for people to hear how we came to faith but ultimately if we are pointing people to Jesus then it is to those first disciples and their testimony in the Bible that we must point our friends.

As I said at the beginning we may in so many ways find ourselves identifying with Thomas. But I don’t think he is a great role model is he?

I think if Thomas were here today he would encourage us not to make the mistake that he made but instead to believe on his testimony.