

Midweek Reflection – Thursday 23rd April

Thomas – Rev Dr Theresa Jones

John 20. 19-end

The Italian painter Caravaggio, in one of his works of art, shows the apostle Thomas poking his finger into the scar in Jesus' side. The painting is called 'The Incredulity of St. Thomas'. I recall, as a youngster, hearing Thomas spoken of as 'Doubting Thomas' ... In fact, my Father was called Thomas and my Mother often referred to him as Doubting Thomas, especially when he didn't believe what we were telling him or worse still what my Mother was telling him! Of course, we still use the expression the expression today. Thomas was a warning to us all to think twice if we are going to doubt the resurrection of Christ. But I have a certain sympathy with Thomas because I think he was one of the first **critical thinkers** in the realm of Christian theology. And many of us can be thankful for that. He was sceptical when he heard the story of Jesus' appearance to the other disciples. And he was, I'm sure, behaving quite normally, honestly, and rationally, because people do not return from the dead. So, of **course**, Thomas wanted to see the scars on Jesus's body and even **touch** them before **he** was going to believe any of this stuff.

Thomas is rebuked by Jesus for his unbelief and witnessing those scars for himself he can only cry out: 'My Lord and my God!'

There was another time when Thomas played the critical theologian and that was at the Last Supper when Jesus says: 'You know where I am going,' but Thomas protests that they don't know at all where he's going. We then get those celebrated words of Jesus: 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' Thomas doesn't get a lot of lines in the gospels but in chapter 11 of St. John's gospel on the occasion when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead Thomas is there. The disciples don't want Jesus to return to Judea, where the Jews had previously tried to stone him and when they realise they are not going to change his mind Thomas says: "Let us also go, that we might die with him". So at one time Thomas had found faith in the person of Jesus and was willing to risk death. ... But none of these things were now uppermost in his mind because things had changed radically, the person **he knew** had been crucified; he'd gone and there was no hope just fear and danger for his followers.

Sometimes, just like Thomas, we may miss something crucial and people are always willing to let us know just how much we've missed. But of all things to miss out on...the resurrected Christ!

What could Thomas say only, '**I don't believe it**'.

Fortunately for Thomas eight days later he does get an opportunity to see for himself that this Jesus has in fact risen from the dead and he is invited to put his finger on the nail holes and his hand into the scar on Jesus' side and told not to doubt but to believe. Jesus takes the opportunity to commend those who have not seen things with their own eyes and yet believe.

But Thomas, with his sceptical mind, and the painter Caravaggio have given us something else to think about and it is the fact that those scars are indeed **still there**. Yes, Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples and to others but because of Thomas's doubting we get a detailed focus on those scars.

Once at a Good Friday service, I took the theme 'Christ of the Scars' and one of the prayers we said was:

'Christ of the scars into your hands, we place the broken, the wounded the hungry and the homeless'. We could say today 'into your hands we place all people suffering from Corona Virus, all NHS staff and all Care Workers. We can also place there the bereaved at this time and ourselves for strength and protection.

Because of those scars we can claim the help of Jesus because he bore them for us; He's risen, yes, but still bears those scars on which we can meditate and give thanks because the scars are the symbol of the success of Jesus' mission and tokens of our salvation.

St Thomas went on, it's believed by some scholars, to take the gospel as far as India and there's a Gospel of Thomas which didn't get into the canon of scripture. But nevertheless, we get to know something of him from those short gospel accounts and find that Christ came, understanding his doubts, just as he does our own doubts and rescued Thomas from them, so that he could carry out the command to go and preach the gospel to all nations. Amen.