

Trinity 3 2022

Thomas

Sometimes people tell me that they have some big questions for God when they get to heaven. Usually, they are people that have had some terrible things happen to them in their life and they want to ask God why he allowed those things to happen. And that is entirely understandable. I think that when we see Jesus, face to face, when we stand in the very presence of God we will be overwhelmed with His love. I am not saying that those things won't matter, or that they won't still be a part of us. Jesus still bears the scars of His crucifixion, but as the hymn says, those wounds yet visible above are in beauty glorified. When we stand in His presence we will finally be fully healed and whole.

I think Thomas gets a rough deal really. I mean, seriously who are we to call one of the twelve, one of the Apostles, one of the greatest evangelists and missionaries ever, Doubting Thomas? It interesting that Thomas wasn't there when the others first saw Jesus. He may have had good reason not to be there, but faith is always harder on your own, Jesus always sent the disciples out in twos. The others were together and able to encourage one another to believe what they had just seen – was that really Jesus, did that really just happen?

Doubt is human and natural and an important part of faith. We all doubt, especially when things get tough. And even when we have seen amazing things happen in our lives, afterwards we can easily doubt them. When we were in Cyprus earlier in the year, we were woken by an earthquake that went on for maybe a couple of minutes, maybe less. It was a bit scary, and we were holding hands and wondering what was going to happen. But afterwards it was as if nothing had happened and if I had been on my own I might well have said to myself, that wasn't as scary as you thought it was – you have exaggerated that in your mind – but we experienced it together and could reassure each other of what had just happened.

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Back to Thomas though. He wasn't going to believe until he touched the wounds on Jesus, hand, and side. He was not going to trust the word of the others. But that wasn't what happened. When Thomas was in the presence of Jesus, we are not told that he touched those wounds. Jesus offered, but all Thomas could do was to say, "my Lord and my God!". The first person as far as we know, to address Jesus as God. Jesus told Thomas that those of us who will believe without seeing are blessed, not better but blessed.

But we too are allowed to have our doubts. As I said, it is a part of faith – only cults do not accept doubt.

In Romans 4, it says that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. God told Abraham that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky. Abraham had great faith. He left his home and family and set out on a great journey not really knowing where he would end up, but trusting in God. But he had doubts, for sure. He came to be an old man with no children, he must have doubted what God had told him about his descendants. Sarah certainly doubted, she persuaded him that the only way to bring this about was for Abraham to sleep with Hagar. And then when the three visitors came and told her she would have a child, she laughed out loud. Few people have experienced visual appearances from Jesus. Even Paul on the road to Damascus only heard and experienced Him. We are all different and due to our different personalities, some of us find faith easier than others. We all have to trust in the witness that we read in the Bible, we all have to trust in our own experience of times when we know God has been at work in our own lives and what we see of Him working in the lives of others. Some of us have seen, or even experienced miracles. And yet we will still sometimes think, "did that really happen"? And of course, the enemy delights to whisper in our ear,

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“Did God really say? Did that really happen? If God really loves you then why is he allowing you to suffer? If God really exists, why is He allowing such awful things to happen in the world?”

Yesterday someone was describing to me a time when she first became a Christian when she was full of the Holy Spirit and how amazing she felt, and how easy everything was, and how she just couldn't help but tell everyone about Jesus. Why can't it always be like that she asked. I don't really know the answer. But we live in a fallen world where people suffer. Jesus came and experienced human suffering, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pain. We can be sure that he understands when we are suffering because He suffered. In fact, it is unlikely that any of us will ever suffer anything like what He suffered – and he endured that pain for us, because he loves us. Perhaps we too need to experience the hard times so that we can understand what others are going through, have compassion on them and love them. It is in the difficult times and the doubting times that we learn to trust God no matter what. We learn that even when it feels as if He is a million miles away, we can trust His promise that he won't ever leave us or forsake us. We learn to encourage each other. We learn the humility of depending on others. We learn to receive as well as to give – and for some of us, that is one of the hardest lessons to learn. We learn to trust His word, to trust the witness and testimony of others. To trust in the things that we know that God has done for us in the past. And sometimes we doubt. And God knows our doubts and our fears. It is better to be honest, like Thomas, because we can't hide from God. When we have doubts and fears we can bring them to God, we can share them with each other, we can pray for each other, encourage each other. People sometimes say that even in the depths of depression they have been aware of God's presence. That wasn't my experience. When my depression was at its worst

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my faith was hanging by a thread. I have never experienced as much doubt as I did then. But thankfully I was able to keep going to Church, even to preach sometimes. I didn't feel His presence at the time, but now when I look back I can see that He was with me, that He brought me through it and my faith revived. If you are feeling strong in your faith today – wonderful, make sure that you bless and encourage others and pray faithfully for your brothers and sisters who are struggling. If you are struggling with your faith today, if you are experiencing doubts, then be honest. Allow yourself to be vulnerable to others and ask for prayer. We are given to each other in order to bless and encourage each other, to carry those who are weak and to be carried when we are weak. God knows and understands and loves us. Jesus did not berate Thomas for his lack of faith, and He won't berate us, He loves us, He is for us and each one of us will one day stand before Him and all our doubts and fears will fall away as we declare, My Lord and my God!