

Throughout the Gospels, we meet different individuals and different personalities. Some appear for just a brief moment, like Nathaniel, summoned by his friend Philip, and immediately convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, (John 1:43-51) some we get to know from their first encounter with Jesus, like Simon Peter, and on many occasions afterwards, so that they become like familiar friends! Thomas steps into the limelight as Jesus approaches the end of his ministry. To call him Doubting Thomas is to reduce him unfairly to a one sided character.

Jesus is trying to explain that he'll be leaving soon. He says that he is going to his father's house to prepare a place for them. This is confusing. Where is he going? What does he mean by a place for everyone? Thomas is the one who admits to his bewilderment and is bold enough to ask the question.

"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ([John 14:5](#)). Jesus responds with these wonderful words: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" ([John 14:6](#)). Jesus isn't talking about google maps, he's talking about himself. Thomas has asked just the right question.

A message comes for Jesus that his friend Lazarus is at the point of death. Jesus announces that he will go, but the disciples are fearful and try to dissuade him. Thomas speaks up, loyal, bold, undaunted, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" ([John 11:16](#)). Does he have any idea what he's saying? I believe that he does. Roman 'justice' was quickly decided and brutally dispensed in those days.

The next time we see Thomas, Jesus is dead and buried. The friends have lived the roller coaster ride of exhilaration on Palm Sunday to horror and panic at Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. They have denied being anything to do with him, hidden from the authorities and kept quiet. Just Jesus' mother, some other women and John stood by the cross as he died. Now, huddled together in a locked room, they go over the events of the last week, over and over again, what happened, who said what, who was there, what the women who went to the tomb saw and how Peter and John rushed and saw the empty tomb as well. Regrets, fears, anxiety. Has he been taken up into heaven like Moses and Elijah? How to make sense of all of this?

Suddenly Jesus is there with them. Dead and now alive again. Injured, and according to Luke, eating fish.

But Thomas isn't there. When he gets back, Jesus is gone, and the friends are full of the news.

They tell him about how Jesus appeared, blessed them with words of peace, showed them his wounds, and gave them authority to work in his name and on his behalf. He breathed holy life into them. But Thomas has missed all that. I think he feels terribly left out. Have you ever missed a party, arrived to find friends discussing the fun they had, who was there, the delicious food, the banging music, the great conversation?

And this is the best, most thrilling, exciting party ever! They had been feeling lost without their powerful, charismatic leader, and here he was, bringing them peace in the midst of their dread and turmoil, and awarding them the most amazing gifts imaginable.

How does poor Thomas feel? Angry? Excluded? Hurt? Some people express their disappointment with tears, some with fury. No wonder he shouts 'I need to see this! I need to touch the wounds! I must witness Jesus' return myself!'

Not doubting Thomas, therefore, but neglected, I think. We all feel distant from God at times. We all need the reassurance that, wherever we are on a scale of 1-10, as they say, Jesus knows what it's like, and he knows what will do us good. Just as Jesus knows about Nathaniel before they met, he hears Thomas' outburst. John 20:27 <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Perhaps Thomas falls to his knees, to respond, <sup>28</sup> ..., "My Lord and my God!"

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed;'

I envision Jesus looking down at Thomas, and blessing him, and then lifting his head and gazing at all his dear friends, and saying 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' It seems to me that at this moment the transformation begins. The disciples, friends learning from their Rabbi, are to become apostles, messengers, people chosen, equipped, and sent with divine authority to share the good news.

Tradition has it that Thomas went off to India, spreading the gospel and setting up churches, and was perhaps martyred there. There are certainly churches dedicated to him in Kerala.

The Thomas we have met is a brave man, prepared to meet his death with Jesus; a thoughtful man, keen to ask questions to better understand Jesus; an honest man, ready to express his frustration; a devoted and utterly committed follower of Jesus.

What is Jesus' message for us, today in Holy Trinity School, in sunny Sunningdale? He knew what Thomas needed and met that need with encouragement, gentleness and grace. He sweetly, deeply knows how we're feeling, and how to meet our needs. When we cry out in sadness or suffering, when we're feeling tormented or worn out, when we're longing to do the right thing, he's there with us. When we don't understand, he offers an explanation which, maybe, we can grasp, or consoles us with, 'look, you'll get this later. It's not for now.' He will respond to us, lovingly, and generously, refilling us with faith. We can set doubts and fears to one side and declare, my Lord and my God.