

Thomas, a sign for our generation?
Scripture from John 20:24-29

Have you heard of doubting Thomas?

Thomas was one of the twelve disciples who spent around 3-years with Jesus. After the dramatic events of Jesus' death, he could not believe the reports from other witnesses that Jesus had returned to life.

Here's some of what was recorded:

Jesus appears to Thomas,

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!'

But he said to them, '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.'

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' 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.'

Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'

Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

Unless I See!

It is not fair to give Thomas a hard time for being a doubter, because it is already well-established that all of the disciples, both those close to Jesus and the many others, had all also been very surprised and un-believing that Jesus was returned to life.

For example, the women at the tomb took time to be convinced, first meeting angels and then Jesus. They ran to the others, Peter and John couldn't believe them and went running up to the tomb to look for themselves.

Thomas' reaction is a way of saying,

'whoa, this is a huge thing! No-one has ever been resurrected by God, having a resurrected body which is not subject to the physical, biological or chemical reactions and restraints of this physical world.'

Sure, Jesus had brought some people back to life from death, as did Elijah, but all those people remained subject to the physical laws. They are all miracles, praise God, for all were asleep in death, but they did not gain resurrected bodies at that time.

Jesus was different. He truly was the first of the resurrection, as Matthew mentioned in his chronicle about graves being opened and the 'many holy people, who had died were raised to life... after Jesus' resurrection.' (Matt.27:52&53)

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Is Thomas as a prophetic sign for our generation?

'Seeing is believing' used to be a common phrase, a way of saying, 'unless I see, I won't believe', just like Thomas did.

Many of us are tempted to say, 'but it is so much easier when we can reach out and touch Jesus!' However, Jesus' reply is to say, 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' (John20:29)

Peter later told others that Jesus did not experience corruption or decay of body, unlike every single person before him. Instead, Jesus is the first of the Resurrection and, like Matthew, Peter told the people that they will be like him when they follow Jesus.

This is the amazing, good news – for by it we too are given an inheritance to eternal life with him. Too often, Christians can get a bit complacent about this, because it is both a basic fact and guaranteed gift that happens when someone becomes a born-again Christian.

By the way, our inheritance begins on day 1! We do not have to go through life trying to earn it and trying to prove to God that we are worthy. Instead, the promise of resurrection life starts straight away, and we are called to live out a life of love for God and others, because of his love. (Jesus said, 'I desire mercy over sacrifice', but more of that in a different blog!)

It is a blessing, partly because the born-again-spiritual-life begins immediately on being born again. Physical life is only temporary, and the blessing Jesus gifts is of permanent connection with him – which comes through the soul.

A few important points to accompany this truth:

- It does not diminish our physical time on earth.
 - We might be tempted to think that this physical life has little purpose beyond being a 'practice-run' if it is only to give us opportunity to follow Jesus by being born-again. Jesus reminded Nicodemus that we must be of water (our physical birth) and by Spirit.¹
 - God created the Earth and Heaven and saw that it was good. As Solomon said, enjoy the days of life, the sight or feel of the warming sun and pleasures of your heart. (Eccl.11:7-9)
 - But it does give the extra dimension that we should always live life with God in mind, 'fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.' (Eccl.12:13b)
- Jesus' resurrection makes more sense of this life, not less. It shows how much God cares for this world and its people, wanting us to enjoy the gift of life and sharing in it with others.

¹ He did not mean by alcoholic spirit through, 'wetting the baby's head'. This was an old English excuse for the dad to go down the pub with the lads!

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Want to think about how Jesus can be seen today?

'What does it take (did it take, for those already born-again) to convince you that Jesus was the first of the resurrection and by it, we too are given the resurrection promise of life in the Kingdom of Heaven?'

Here are a few from my own experience:

- ❖ Because I heard witness statements of how Jesus and/or God's Spirit had changed someone's life. We call this 'personal testimony.'
- ❖ Because I witness the change in people's lives that I know.
- ❖ Because I experienced a familial bond with other Christians, sometimes experienced through 'picking up where we'd left off' in conversations and time together, despite not seeing the other Christian(s) for many months or even several years.
- ❖ Because I experienced an inward change of heart when I invited God's Spirit into my life.

Do not be anxious or put off that Jesus is revealed to us through spiritual means more than physical means. Instead, celebrate that God persons are not constrained by any physical means and begin to live in that truth.

God's persons can reach into any and every heart and into any and every situation. He waits to be invited and he chooses to work through us and not only via his independent means.

A question to reflect on: 'what can I do to make Jesus real to those in my life?'

And it is a challenge for the church, whose job is to help the world see Jesus. For this I will quote Jesus, as narrated by John,

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: love each other. (John 15:16-17)

To bear fruit is to live that live of love dedicated to loving God, neighbour and ourselves.

We are called to live that out as a community of believers; a place where we should practice what it means to live in support of each other, showing the reality of the resurrected Jesus.

We cannot do that by our own works but only through his life-giving Spirit – so ask him!