

But [Thomas] 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.' *John 20.25.*

You have no idea how hard I tried to get out of preaching today. It's been hard graft since Christmas, and the build up to Easter is pretty hectic, as you can imagine. So many people, I thought, would be away after Easter that I thought I would arrange a swap with a neighbouring minister for this Sunday, rather than take the Sunday off. The idea was to use last Sunday's sermon in another church. At least I wouldn't have to write a new one. That would have been a bit of holiday. But, do you know what? They had all beaten me to it. They had all made arrangements to go on holiday. So here I am on Low Sunday, as it is called, presumably because it is an anti-climax after the great build-up to Easter Day. It seems that on Low Sunday not only do the parishioners do a runner, but so do the clergy! But not Hunt. He's at his post.

Low Sunday! Is it called this, because it is a damp squib after Easter? Actually some people think that the word 'low' is a corruption of the Latin word *laudes* (= 'praises') which is the beginning of the ancient sequence for the day: *laudes Salvatori voce modulemur supplici* ('Let us sing praises to the Saviour with humble voice'). This Sunday is even called 'Quasimodo Sunday' after the introit for the day from 1 Peter 2.2: 'like newborn babies crave spiritual milk'. ('Like newborn babies' in Latin is *quasi modo geniti infantes*).

But actually in the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church this is called 'Thomas Sunday'. Far from there being an anti-climax after Easter Day, the Orthodox Church

make much of what we call Easter Week. For the whole week after Easter, right up to this Thomas Sunday, the doors of the great screen, the *iconostasis*, are open to signify the rolling away of the stone outside the tomb where Jesus was laid. They call this 'Renewal Week', and that emphasises what I was saying on Easter Day, that the Resurrection of Christ is not a one-off event to frustrate the work of the devil who put Jesus on the Cross, but the beginning of a great process of renewal which is ongoing through the Holy Spirit as we speak, and which will climax with the final establishment of the new heaven and the new earth of Rev 21 when Christ returns to earth at his 2nd Coming. Bring it on, I say! Maranatha!

So on this 'Thomas Sunday', let's think about Thomas for a moment. Scripture tells us that after his resurrection Jesus waited forty days to shew himself as really alive to his disciples. He appeared to Mary as the gardener, to Cleopas and his companion journeying to Emmaus, to Peter out fishing one day, to the frightened disciples hiding behind locked doors, and even on one occasion to a group of more than 500 believers. Jesus needed to prove to his followers that he really had been physically and bodily raised from the dead. They, like us, found it hard to believe, but Jesus graciously came to them to take away all doubt.

It was during one of these appearances behind locked doors that for some reason our friend Thomas was away. Let's turn to p1089, to *John* 20.19-20... When he returned, they couldn't wait to tell his the glad tidings. But he naturally thought they were having him on, vv24-25... 'Unless I see ... and

put my finger, I will not believe'. Isn't Thomas each of us? 'I need *proof*'. I think it's wonderful that the Bible includes 'Doubting' Thomas, because we are *all* doubters. We *all* need proof, don't we? There was an article in the newspaper recently by the historian Simon Sebag Montefiore about the events of the crucifixion. He kept making the point that ultimately we can't *know*; you just have to make that leap of faith. But this simply isn't the case. You *can* know. Thomas was not content just to leave it to faith. He wanted *proof*. He needed hard *facts*. And this is the absolutely best bit: the living Lord Jesus came back to him to *give* him the facts, the proof which he so much needed. Isn't he a great Saviour? Let's read vv26-27... And this is the whole point; it isn't, as Simon Sebag Montefiore said, ultimately a matter of faith. Jesus didn't just leave them with an empty tomb. For forty days he actually came to them and gave them *proof*.

There is nothing wrong with honest doubt. Who could have blamed Thomas for being sceptical? Hasn't God given us minds and critical faculties? We are not required to believe any old nonsense. God knows this and provides for us. Didn't the risen Jesus *come* to Mary in the garden, Peter out fishing, Doubting Thomas, the two walking to Emmaus? They didn't come to him.

The Bible contains the account of Thomas the sceptic, Thomas the honest doubter. The Bible also has the Book of Psalms, 70% of which is our moans and complaints. 'Why do the wicked prosper, Lord?' 'How long will this unfairness and pain go on, Lord?' There is nothing wrong in asking these questions. The Bible is full of them.

I talked about *honest* doubt. We all have our questions and our struggles in the Christian life. As he came to Thomas, so the living Lord Jesus will come to us with our own doubts. He won't be angry with us and cast us aside as people of little faith. Again the Bible records the beautiful story of the father frantic for his epileptic son. When Jesus asked him, 'Do you believe?' he famously answered, 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief'. Jesus did not reject him for that.

Asking questions, reading, doubting, examining evidence and being critical - these are not wrong, and, don't worry, Jesus the truth can take anything we throw at him. Doubting and questioning shew that you take God seriously. What *is* wrong is *indifference* to God. Many people are so indifferent to God that they don't even bother to ask questions. Then there are the clever-dicks who ask their put-down questions, but aren't listening for the answers. There are countless books written about the relationship between science and religion. Many scientists, of course, are Christians who really think these things through. But atheist scientists have never given it a second's thought, because, for them, it is the Christians who have to make their case, not the scientists who have to defend their atheism. Why? This is lazy thinking.

Here is the Good News of our gracious God. Not only did Jesus not condemn Thomas, the honest doubter, he actually came back specially to give him the proof he needed. And Thomas became the first person ever to acknowledge the divinity of the risen Christ. When at Jesus's invitation he actually touched his wounds, he famously said, 'My Lord, and my God!'