

Ephesians 2:19-end

John 20:24-29

Introduction

This week as I was doing some research in preparation for an assembly I was leading I became distracted. I came upon the fact that King Edward 1st Of England was also known as 'Longshanks', presumably because of his long legs, and 'The hammer of the Scots', because of his bloody determination to subdue the Scots and bring them under English rule.

I began thinking about nicknames and found that many kings have nicknames. Among them are: In England Athelbald, Alfred the Great, Edward the Elder, Edward the Martyr, Aethelred the Unready, Sweyn Forkbeard, Edmund Ironside, Edward the Confessor, Bloody Mary, and on the continent; Sebastian the asleep (of Portugal) Charles 'The Affable' (the 8th of France) There were 8 European Kings called 'The Bad' and 7 called 'the bald' and then of course there were Ivan 'The Terrible' and Catherine ' the great' .

Nicknames are helpful because they are descriptive and tell us something about a person. St Thomas the Apostle had two nicknames, but we generally only think of one. How do we remember him? Does anyone know his other name? 'The Twin'. Thomas means twin in Aramaic and Didymus also means twin in Greek. We assume that the name simply refers to the fact that he actually was a twin; I have heard someone explaining it that he was called the twin because he always had someone with him and was bringing people to Jesus. There is no evidence of that but when we read John's Gospel we find out quite a lot about Thomas, his character and his role as a disciple.

Ephesians 2:19-end

John 20:24-29

Some Commentators are a bit unfair to Thomas. Tom Wright describes him as : loyal, dogged, slow to understand but determined to continue putting one foot in front of the other at Jesus's command. He also describes him as 'typically grumpy'. When reading the Gospels I don't think Thomas actually deserved some of those opinions.

He asked questions; when Jesus told his disciples at the last supper that he was going to prepare a place for them and that they know the way to that place Thomas's response was typical of him, 'Lord we don't know where you are going so how can we know the way?' Thomas liked to be clear, he liked to know where he stood and he wanted to understand. I suspect that in today's world he may well have been a data analyst!

It is clear that **Thomas was also courageous**, if perhaps a little gloomy. In the account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead there was an argument between the disciples and Jesus. His disciples were not keen that Jesus should return to the outskirts of Jerusalem. They said to him "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

Jesus was firm in his intention . ' let us go to him."

¹⁶ Then Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Thomas was loyal and courageous. He might not understand everything Jesus said, but he wasn't afraid of asking and he wasn't afraid of going into danger in support of his leader. I guess he could therefore, equally have been described as 'Thomas the brave'.

Ephesians 2:19-end

John 20:24-29

He also liked to know the facts

This morning's reading is the one that has earned him the name we all know him by, 'Doubting Thomas'. Yet again this simply bears out Thomas's character. He wasn't unwilling to believe but he wanted proof of Jesus' resurrection.

Belief is an interesting thing. What is necessary for belief? On that first Easter day the disciples saw various things that pointed to the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead. The empty tomb alone wasn't sufficient to make them believe for certain that Jesus had risen again. It pointed to the fact that something amazing had happened but in itself wasn't certain proof. Luke tells us that having seen the empty tomb and the grave clothes Peter went away wondering. John tells us that the other disciple (who we believe to be John) saw and believed though he doesn't say exactly what he believed. The women's testimony wasn't enough. The men didn't believe them and had to go and see for themselves

It was a personal encounter with the risen Lord that convinced the disciples that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. Mary had been deeply distressed by the empty tomb and was unable to understand its significance other than that someone had stolen the body - she needed to personally meet Jesus, hear his voice and hold onto him to absorb the amazing fact of his resurrection. In the passage that precedes our Gospel reading we are told that Jesus came to the upper room and stood amongst the disciples. He stood amongst them, spoke to them and showed them the proof of his suffering and death. It was as they both

Ephesians 2:19-end**John 20:24-29**

saw him and heard his voice that they recognized that this was indeed their Lord and master and that he had truly risen from the grave. John tells us " they were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." Thomas was asking for a personal encounter like that of the other disciples – though he goes further and actually asks for physical contact. In the event; when this is offered he doesn't need it, though his requirement shows that he would not be content with less than the truth.

It often surprises me that we are so harsh in our judgement of Thomas. Doubting Thomas we call him as if he should have believed in the resurrection. Why should he have believed? It is clear from the gospel accounts that despite the fact that Jesus had preached on more than one occasion that he would not only die but rise again from the dead none of the disciples were actually expecting that to happen. For them Jesus' death was the end of a dream. They were devastated and certainly not expecting to meet with Jesus that first Easter day.

Thomas wanted to see Jesus for himself, to see the proof of his suffering and to touch him. He wanted to know beyond doubt that Jesus' resurrection was real. That this wasn't a hallucination or a ghost (or an April fool!) but that Jesus had physically risen from the dead. In fact he wasn't asking for any more than Jesus had given the other disciples. He had spoken to them and shown them the proof of his suffering. He had shown them clearly that this was a real human body in front of them even if it could come through locked doors. Thomas wanted a more substantial proof - he

Ephesians 2:19-end**John 20:24-29**

wanted to touch Jesus' wounds - but was that so unreasonable? For the rest of his life he would be able to preach Jesus' resurrection without the shadow of a doubt and be able to back up his testimony with the fact that he had actually seen the proof for himself.

Thomas' encounter with the risen Lord not only convinced him of the truth of the resurrection but showed him that Jesus was in truth his Lord and his God. It is this truth that Jesus sent his disciples out to proclaim. His resurrection and his appearances to his disciples after his death would have meant nothing if they had not born witness to that fact. His whole purpose in appearing before them was so that they could preach Christ, not only crucified but risen. They were to bear witness to the ends of the earth that Jesus Christ died to save us and rose from the dead to win eternal life for us. If the disciples had kept this fact a secret Jesus ministry would have been for nothing at all.

In order to bear witness they were given Jesus' authority over sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit to equip them for their mission. John tells us that he has recorded these events, not only Jesus' earthly ministry but also his death and resurrection, so that his readers might believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and, by believing, have eternal life in Jesus' name.

That commission has been passed on to us as Jesus disciples. We too are called to proclaim the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection. We have not seen it personally for ourselves. We haven't had the privilege of being able to see Jesus' wounds and touch them for

Ephesians 2:19-end**John 20:24-29**

ourselves but we have Jesus' blessing. He said "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed".

Our experience of belief is exactly the same as that of those first disciples. They were only able to proclaim the risen Christ after they had personally encountered him - and we will only be able to proclaim the risen Christ if we have encountered him personally ourselves. We may not have seen him but we can certainly have met him.

I remember, as clearly as if it were yesterday the day I first encountered the risen Christ. It was 49 years ago when I was sixteen. I had been taught all my life that Jesus had died and had risen again but that fact had an unreality about it. It was something I knew - but it had no actual effect on my life. It made no difference to the way I lived or to the things that were important to me. It was almost irrelevant because it didn't seem real. Then I met someone to whom the risen Christ was a living breathing reality and their testimony convinced me that Jesus was alive and cared very deeply for me. That was a turning point for me and there hasn't been a moment since when the risen Christ hasn't been a part of my life - even though there have been times when I have turned away and have tried to exclude him.

In his letter John tells his readers, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete". It is as we proclaim the risen Christ to others that they too can meet with him and

Ephesians 2:19-end**John 20:24-29**

will have true fellowship with us. Thomas was excluded from the fellowship of the disciples after that first Easter evening. They had shared in something that he had missed. They knew something that he didn't and they were certain of something that he could not believe. It was only when he himself encountered the risen Jesus that he was again fully able to share in fellowship with the others.

It is up to us whether the people that we know and love, those we live amongst and work with, encounter the risen Lord Jesus. They will only know about the reality of the resurrection if we make it known in our lives and by our testimony. It will be as we present the risen Christ to them that they will encounter him and believe. We may not be able to show them Jesus in person or enable them to put their hands in his wounds but we can show them his presence at work in our lives. Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit to show his living presence to others. It is as the fruits and gifts of the Spirit are seen in us that others will be able to encounter the risen Jesus. It is as we worship Jesus as our Lord and God, and obey him in the way that we live, that others will be able to see the reality of the risen Christ and encounter him for themselves.