

LOW SUNDAY, 12 April 2015
A sermon from Anne Townsend

I find that there are times when I do things that I'd never have expected to do in my wildest dreams! Preaching to you from my mobility scooter (as I am doing today) is *certainly* one of those things.

Here I am *low down*, instead of being *high up* in the pulpit. And, funnily enough, I am 'low down' on the Sunday the year which is called Low Sunday!

The origin of the name 'Low Sunday' is shrouded in the mists of time. But it seems to fit. We were certainly on a high with our celebrations last Sunday – right down to the Vicar hurling Easter eggs over the top of the church tower. Perhaps the words 'Low Sunday' fit our moods today. It's as if our church calendar is telling us to 'chill-out'.

After the greyness of 40 days of Lent, and our journey through Holy Week, we then experienced the exhilarating joy of the resurrection. Last week we rightly sang our Alleluias – the church was full, the flowers were stunning, joyful anthems were sung, and the resurrection message was proclaimed.

And then, today, what do we have but that disciple Thomas!

I have a great deal of fellow feeling with him. I can just imagine him standing there, thinking that all the other disciples had totally lost the plot. They claimed to have *seen* Jesus - that he was *alive*. What ludicrous madness! 'Why on earth', he must have wondered, 'Are they putting around such ridiculous stories?'

I reckon that Thomas is, and always has been, representative of *us* – you and me. He stands there for the rest of us and says, 'Give me proof!'

My granddaughter, Esther, is training to be a research chemist. She puts different elements into a test tube, adds a catalyst and waits to see what the reaction will be. When some of us start asking questions about our faith, we may find that our questioning is a kind of catalyst that kick-starts a reaction which may gradually turn into faith. Asking questions isn't detrimental rather it can boost faith.



The popular attitude among some Christians concerning doubt reminds me of a conversation between Alice in Wonderland and the Mad Hatter. Alice proudly tells the Mad Hatter that: '*Sometimes, I believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast.*' And the Hatter replies: '*That is an excellent practice!*'



I guess that Thomas, would strongly disagree with both Alice and the Mad Hatter.

It's no bad thing to have a Thomas who says, 'Hang on a minute, show me the proof!' *Doubting* Thomas? *Courageous* Thomas, more like!

So, we hear how Jesus returned a week later, at the same time - apparently to put Thomas right. Yet, despite what Jesus tells Thomas ('*Do not doubt but believe, and blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe!*') it seems that the process in play here is one in which Thomas comes to faith *because* he has the courage to voice his doubt!

To doubt is not to deny what is true, rather, it is to go in search of what is true in order that you may find it. Doubting is a necessary process that enables us to finally accept truth.

What about the rest of Jesus' disciples as we meet them in today's gospel reading? They'd had a long, bewildering, exhausting day. Good Friday had demolished their hopes and dreams, and then this day had begun with their discovery that the body of their crucified teacher had disappeared - and they had no idea who might have taken it away.

Harrowed and blinkered by grief, they'd forgotten what Jesus had spent three years trying to show them, and so his death on the cross was no more than a huge loss to them.

They do what many of us human beings do in such circumstances – they lock themselves away. Shut away behind doors of wood and walls of plaster, they try to make themselves feel a bit safer in the middle of a hostile and chaotic world. They were shaken and disturbed by what had happened. They were too afraid to tell outsiders what had happened - fearing they'd then face further danger. Not only were they afraid, but some of them may have felt guilty for letting Jesus down, for not supporting him better, for deserting him and running away.

Of course, being ordinary human beings, they'd have experienced all those feelings we experience in our bereavements. Each of us needs strong loving bonds with others for our emotional well-being. Loss through death permanently breaks this bond. In grieving, the disciples, like us, would have struggled to maintain that emotional bond, while also coming to terms with the reality of their loss – eventually, separating from the one who'd died and adjusting to a world without them. The disciples, like us, would each have experienced their unique bereavement reaction.

So, what ever must it have been like when Jesus suddenly appeared from nowhere in the middle of that locked room.

What did he want? What would he say? Would he tell them off, or be furious at the way they'd treated him? Would he show all too clearly how disappointed he was that some of them had let

him down?

What Jesus does is to offer them Peace - 'Shalom Alechim', 'Peace be with you'. An ancient Hebraic greeting. He knows, understands and accepts all they've been through ... all we've been through.

Back to Thomas for a moment – Thomas wanting to touch Jesus' wounds. Wounds that were still there and were so important for Thomas.



It reminds me of an interview a few years ago, in the Daily Telegraph, when actor Keira Knightly commented, 'As life goes on, you pick up wounds, and for an actor it's terribly important to have those wounds to draw on.' And, like Keira Knightly, you and I can 'draw on our wounds'.

Here I am with my physical woundedness all too visible ... I can't stand or walk at the moment. Of course, you can't see those other wounds that I carry round inside my psyche - but they are there.



Many of us carry wounds of one sort or another – and they are there for us to draw on. Of course, they're painful, they may give us sleepless nights, we may shed many tears because of them *but* we *can* accept them as a gift, for which we even thank God. We can do this for, surely, part of the Easter message is that it is the very ordinary pains and losses of life, both big and small, that can be like yeast that fuels a kind of resurrection in us.

We can draw on them as something that has the potential to create a different quality of life inside us, and as something that can open up a deeper experience of God's love for us, enlarging our sense of what a sad, joyful and wonderful business it is to be alive.

Thomas doubted, the disciples were scared stiff and faced a huge bereavement, and Jesus' wounds brought new life, as our own wounds can do.

I hope I've managed to share something that is relevant to you and your situation. As someone said, 'If the cap fits, wear it!'