

'THOMAS: GOSPEL AND DOUBT' # 3

It is getting towards the end of the first (historic) day following the Resurrection, the first day of the new creation, the first day of the new covenant. The risen Jesus has appeared to Mary Magdalene and (according to the other gospels) also to some women followers; and together with the disciples, they were covertly meeting behind locked doors.

Read John 20:19-31

Three times in this passage “Peace be with you” is Jesus’ recorded greeting. *Why might this be a particularly important greeting from Jesus at this time?* Everyone in the room seems to be surprised, even shocked, to see Jesus, but he proves to them that he is not a ghost or someone else, he is the same Jesus (almost) as he was 3 days ago. Importantly, they can all now say “we have seen the Lord”, becoming eyewitnesses. Having established beyond doubt his identity, Jesus commissions them and empowers them by breathing into them the Holy Spirit. (I am going to avoid comment on verse 23 today as to delve into it would take a whole separate study). *Can you recall another event, recorded early in the Bible, in which God starts new life by breathing into them? What, if any, are the parallels?* As always, God empowers people before sending them, and this empowering is ‘new life’.

‘Seeing is believing.’ It would be much simpler for us all if there was a video recording of both the crucifixion and resurrection events. I suspect most of us can identify with Thomas in one way or another. If you have faith, then almost certainly, you will have doubts at some point. Doubts are not the same as unbelief. Jesus knows of Thomas’ doubts. *How does Jesus deal with this? Would you say Jesus gave Thomas a sharp rebuke or what? When someone you love does not believe you have done something, does this challenge the way you respond?* “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have faith”. Jesus seems to recognise that, in our human frailty, having doubts are part of our makeup. Throughout the Bible there are examples of key figures showing doubts. Think of Peter sinking into the lake (Matthew 14:30), or Moses doubting he could lead Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 3). Having doubts is not betraying your faith, but raising questions about it. As Christians we are encouraged to simply believe – but not to believe simply. Wrestling with doubts and resolving them can strengthen our faith. *Where have you turned in the past to find resolution to your doubts? Did or could your Life Group, play a part in this? If so, how?*

Doubts can arise at any time, often as a result of a trauma in life, from relying on feelings rather than facts, and from confusion resulting from poor scriptural teaching. *With information and advice available from a myriad of sources, how do you select or check the validity of a source?*

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for the joy and peace which is your gift to those who choose to worship you. We bring before you all those who currently have doubts about their faith, asking that the Holy Spirit will reaffirm the certainty of your faithfulness and fill them afresh with trust in you. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen