

Sermon 28th April, 2019-04-27, St George's Eden.

Text John:20 : 19-31

A couple of months ago we had to go to Canberra for a night and we stayed on the edge of the city near Hindmarsh Drive. In the evening, I went for a walk up the road between dusty paddocks and I was curious to see a church sign by a drive way that disappeared over the hill.

The sign said SyroMalabar Church of St Thomas. This made me curious and on returning home I looked it up and found that this church was established in South India centuries ago. Ultimately the Indian Christians there believe that the several different churches on the Malabar Coast were established by St Thomas in around 52AD. According to tradition, Thomas lived there for over 20 years and eventually was martyred near Madras and a church there holds his tomb.

If this tradition is so - Thomas was another one of Jesus disciples who obeyed his command recorded in Matthew, to go to all peoples everywhere & to almost the end of the known world then and make them his disciples.

But the focus of our reading this morning is not on his eventual obedience - but on his initial doubt when told of Jesus' resurrection. Thomas was missing on the evening of the first Sunday when Jesus appeared to the others in the locked room. Some commentators suggest this might have been because he was in fact braver than the rest. When Jesus said he was going to Bethany after hearing of the death of Lazarus, Thomas was the one who insisted that they go with Jesus - saying in John 11,16. "Let us also go to die with him"

But whatever the reason Thomas was not there and when he returned and was told the news that they had seen Jesus he doubted their story and said that he wanted clear evidence for himself. – and a week later (and it must have been along week for Thomas) Jesus

reappeared to the whole group. Jesus response to Thomas showed that he neither rejected or doubted Thomas. Instead he invited him to believe. Thomas touched Jesus hands and his side and then spoke one of the greatest statements of belief
MY LORD AND MY GOD.!!

Thus the Risen Lord Jesus made it clear that he is open and ready to meet all of us wherever we find ourselves.

If you check the other resurrection appearance stories in the other gospels they also give similar insights.

In Matthew's version, the angel had told the women on the Sunday morning to tell the eleven disciples to go to Galilee and it is recorded that when they saw him they worshipped him even though some of them doubted.

In Mark, Mary Magdalene told the others she had seen Jesus but they did not believe.

In Luke, Cleopas and his friend walked & talked for 7 miles towards Emmaus with Jesus but did not recognise him till they stopped to eat and Jesus broke bread and blessed it.

Paul writing in about 50AD, around 20 years after the events - also records in his first letter to the Corinthians Chapter 15 that Jesus appeared to Peter first, then to all the apostles, then to more than 500 of his followers at once, then to James. And finally also to Paul on the Damascus Road. If you notice the 3 apostles he names Peter is the one who denied Christ 3 times
James is probably the brother of Jesus who initially did not believe him and Paul was the one who had persecuted the church and was in fact on the way to Damascus to persecute even more when he encountered the risen Christ.

And so it is with us when we honestly think of our lives – at times we too waver between faith and doubt but the fact that we are here together this morning suggests that we have eventually decided on faith. Thomas wanted assurance and evidence. He also wanted Jesus and needed personal connection to dispel his doubts. Mary could not experience the resurrected Jesus for the disciples & they could not experience Jesus for Thomas.

And we do see that our Christian faith is a mixture of personal and community experiences .

A few weeks ago in the weekly Bible Study we looked at the Christian way and we were thinking of the idea that as Christians we should expect the surprising presence of Jesus at times in our lives. A couple of people shared their own surprising experiences and I remember thinking that we all could have gone on sharing like that –

we all can think of times when Jesus has been close & when he amazes us with his love and care for us even in small details of our lives.

Dr Ern Crocker of Sydney has written about people who have faced suffering but kept the faith. One story that he introduced with today's reading is about a small 3year old boy who nearly drowned at a waterhole in Arnhem Land, NT>

On 26th February, 2014.....some boys went to cool off in the local pool when they found a small boy in the muddy water.

The 11 year old dragged him out of the water and began CPR. He had seen it performed on TV.. The others knelt in the mud and prayed for him. Water spluttered from the boy and he coughed but remained unconscious. The noise alerted two women who were passing by.

One was a nurse who put the boy in the recovery position and called for an ambulance. They rushed him to the local clinic, where the local doctor, who was a Christian tried to stabilise him. There were delays in getting the air ambulance from Darwin but the team kept working on him despite the dire situation. People from the village came and 30 ended up praying for his recovery. Then they left and

the little boy woke up. Finally the plane arrived and he was transferred to Darwin, to be discharged three days later with no ill effects. Friends and family rejoiced and were very much encouraged in their faith.

So it is faith (sometimes shaken by doubt) that keeps us on the path of searching for our own experience of Jesus. And we need the support of community – to help us along that path. And it is as our hearts experience him & we trust ourselves to him that like Thomas we can also say “ **My Lord and My God**”