

Sermon 27 April 2025 Doubting Thomas

Hebrews 11:1-6 John 20:24-29

So Jesus appears to the disciples following his resurrection but Thomas is not present and tells his fellow disciples that he won't believe it until he sees Jesus with his own eyes. I believe that, in many ways, Thomas speaks for so many of us. Thomas had doubts - we all have doubts at times. It is very human to have doubts. It is ok to have doubts. Thomas wants tangible proof, and without that tangible proof he is reluctant to believe. Join the club. Who wouldn't like tangible proof? It would certainly make believing in God much easier. And this where faith comes in. Without proof we need to draw on faith.

Let me put this to you. I have faith that it will be fine tomorrow. Why? Because the weather forecast says it will be fine and I trust the weather forecast (silly me!). Now, neither the weather forecast or I can prove that it will be fine – not until after the day is done and we have seen for ourselves. So it requires an act of faith, and the point here is that implicit in this faith is trust.

So why do I have a faith in God? Because I trust the writers of the Bible – no book has been more thoroughly examined, dissected and critiqued (I made that point last Sunday), and it remains the most quoted and widely-read book in the Western world; because I trust the history of our religion and our church – an incredible history and you can't deny history; because I trust prayer – I have tried it and it works; because I trust the inspiration that has led to the creation of the most amazing and breathtaking buildings of worship and works of art and music. I just cannot believe for one minute that they are a product of a myth.

So yes, there is more than a significant degree of trust involved, but just as the weather forecast is based on a wide range of factual information, so my trust in God is similarly based.

I am sure you have at some time watched trapeze artists in action. There's a special relationship between flyer and catcher. The flyer is the one that let's go and the catcher is the one who catches. As the flyer swings high above the crowd, the moment comes when he or she has to let go (let's go with she). She arcs out into the air. Her job is to remain as still as possible and wait in complete trust. The catcher will catch her but she must wait. She must never have any doubts and make a grab for the catcher – that could lead to disaster.

So it is with us and our faith in God. We need to trust. Yes, we need to reach out, but we need to have complete trust that God will catch us. Thomas was lucky, because Jesus was able to walk up to him and show him proof. But Jesus is not going to walk up to us, not in the flesh anyway. But if we can overcome our doubts; if we can, like the trapeze artist, reach out in trust, then we will experience God.

As I said last week, with a faith in God, anything can happen. But I believe God really comes into his own when the chips are down, when we are confronted with life's challenges. That's when we need to draw on that relationship. It's good and most important to acknowledge and praise God when life is cruising along, very important, but in a sense that is laying the foundation for a relationship that we can draw upon when our need is paramount.

Let me give you a couple of pertinent quotes: *'God is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me. O my people, trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge.'* Psalm 62:7-8. And from Jeremiah 17:7, *'Blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope*

and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. That water is life-giving, nourishing and sustaining.

I want to make a point here. Nowhere in those quotes, nor will you find in any passages in the Bible that say that if you have faith then God will ensure that no problems or challenges will come your way. No way! What you will read is that if you have faith, then God will give you the wherewithal to deal with those challenges. Author Robert Rogers wrote, *'My faith didn't remove the pain, but it got me through the pain. Trusting God didn't diminish or vanquish the anguish, but it enabled me to endure it.'*

I want to now pose a question. So we have arrived at a point where we believe, where we can say with a degree of confidence, 'I have faith.' My question is this – What do we do with this faith? We have gone some way in already answering that question – we call on that faith when confronted with life's challenges. But I want to hark back to last week when I referred to the two commandments Jesus gives us. If you remember, this first is 'Love God.' By arriving at a faith we are well on the way to subscribing to that commandment.

Then we come to the second commandment, 'Love your neighbour.' The point I want to make is that if we fail to carry out that commandment to its fullest intent and meaning, then we diminish the authenticity and the validity of that first commandment, 'to love God.' You can't have one without the other. They are, in the words of Jesus, equally important. They depend on one another.

And I want to make this point. When Jesus tells us 'to love our neighbour,' he wants us to go the whole hog. He doesn't mean 'up to a point.' Tony Campolo, professor and writer, tells a lovely story of a young man who was dragged into his office by his father, who let him know in no uncertain terms how unhappy he was with the way his son had turned out. 'I sent him to college to get a good education, to make something of himself, and look at him now. He's immersed in this mission work, out on the streets with pimps and drug pushers. He has given his money away to poor old ladies. He is living like a pauper and all he cares about is reaching out to the losers of the world.' Then the father said, 'Don't get me wrong, Campolo, I am not against being a Christian, but only up to a point!'

We have to ask ourselves, do we fit into that 'up to a point' category? Is there a limit as to how far we are prepared to go, how much of a sacrifice we are prepared to make? God doesn't want us to be pale imitations of what it means to be a disciple, a follower of his. He wants us to be whole-hearted, committed, and that will involve some sacrifice. If we want to make a difference in the lives of others, and therefore our own lives, we need to go the whole hog.

I want to finish by making a final point. I have already expressed the point that with a faith in God, anything can happen. What we can be sure of is that a faith in God will lead to blessings, and both our readings affirm this. I quote from our reading from Hebrews, *'Anyone who comes to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.'* Hebrews 11:6. And those reassuring words Jesus says to Thomas, words which undoubtedly speak to us over two thousand years later: *'Thomas, you believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.'* John 20:29.