**#71 SG 10.30 16 April 23 Lent 2 Low Sunday**

**Acts 2: 14a, 22-32**

**Peter Addresses the Crowd**

**14**But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

**22**‘You that are Israelites,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3A+14a%2C+22-32&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26961a)] listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3A+14a%2C+22-32&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26961b)] a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— **23**this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. **24**But God raised him up, having freed him from death,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3A+14a%2C+22-32&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26963c)] because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. **25**For David says concerning him,

“I saw the Lord always before me,  
    for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;  
**26**therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
    moreover, my flesh will live in hope.  
**27**For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
    or let your Holy One experience corruption.  
**28**You have made known to me the ways of life;  
    you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”

**29**‘Fellow Israelites,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3A+14a%2C+22-32&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26968d)] I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. **30**Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. **31**Foreseeing this, David[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3A+14a%2C+22-32&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26970e)] spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah,[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3A+14a%2C+22-32&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26970f)] saying,

“He was not abandoned to Hades,  
    nor did his flesh experience corruption.”

**32**This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.

### John 20: 19-end

### Jesus Appears to the Disciples

**19**When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ **20**After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. **21**Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ **22**When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. **23**If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

### Jesus and Thomas

**24**But Thomas (who was called the Twin[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2020&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26881c)]), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. **25**So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’

**26**A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ **27**Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ **28**Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ **29**Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’

### The Purpose of This Book

**30**Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. **31**But these are written so that you may come to believe[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2020&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26888d)] that Jesus is the Messiah,[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2020&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26888e)] the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

So, as the dust settles, and Easter Week continues, we arrive at Low Sunday; or, depending on your tradition, at Divine Mercy Sunday, Octave Day of Easter, White Sunday, Quasimodo Sunday, Bright Sunday, Antipascha, New Sunday, Renewal Sunday - or at Thomas Sunday. The Christian Tradition is nothing if not generous, or, you might say, it just can’t make its mind up.

Anyone that’s *not* fallen asleep in Sermons I’ve preached over the last eighteen months might at this point worry that I’m going to start banging on about Thomas again. And you’d be right to worry, because I am. Although I always feel in the shadow of Rev Canon Alex Vaccaro’s brilliant sermon on Thomas that she preached for us here last year, I just can’t shake him off.

‘Unless I see the mark of nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe,’ he says.

These words have led, I think, to some unkind comparisons over the years; comparisons of faith and the depth of faith, of how Thomas lacks faith because of his need for proof. When thinking about this, I’ve always been amused by the passage in Douglas Adams’s ‘The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy,’ where God and humankind are arguing.

# *‘“I refuse to prove that I exist,'" says God, "for proof denies faith, and without faith I am nothing." "But," says Man, "The Babel fish[[1]](#footnote-1) is a dead giveaway, isn't it? It could not have evolved by chance, you had to make it happen. It proves you exist, and so therefore, by your own arguments, you don't." "Oh dear," says God, "I hadn't thought of that," and promptly vanishes in a puff of logic. "Oh, that was easy," says Man, and for an encore goes on to prove that black is white and gets himself killed on the next zebra crossing.”’*

The implicit point is that faith and doubt is a complicated question.

‘Unless I see the mark of nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe,’ Thomas says.

What a human, honest statement his is! I think I comes from a fractured heart, one that questions now, and really, has always questioned. In 14:5 he asks Jesus, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Apart from giving Jesus the feed-line for one of his greatest statements, this seems to have fed into the tradition of doubt around Thomas. He can be forgiven, especially in John’s account of these events from Chapters 13-17 (known as ‘*The Long Farewell*,’ because Jesus is always on the point of leaving, and never seems to) for seeking clarification. And, staying in character, he asks for clarification in our passage. Thomas is in all of us; every time we wonder, ‘what does that mean’? when we hear a bible passage, or we wonder why Jesus, in different Gospel accounts, says contradictory things, we are joining Thomas in his discipleship.

What I see in this story is a man who’s been broken by Good Friday; evidently absent on Easter Sunday, and so not seeing the Resurrection, he has withdrawn, I think, in shock and abject despair. That despair is so deep that he can’t even bear to be with his friends. Perhaps they remind him, too much for his fractured heart, of Jesus.

Then, when they meet again, they say ‘He’s back’.

Its here that Thomas is rightly concerned with his own welfare. ‘I’ve just started to contemplate the possibility,’ he thinks, ‘of life without Him; I’m just coming round to starting to figure out how my life might work without Him. And this lot are telling me he’s back?’

The disciples often miss the transcendent in their reliance on the literal. In this company, he’d be less than human if he didn’t need to see for himself. I imagine him thinking that his heart, perhaps beginning to see hints of how to heal, just can’t take it if they are wrong. If his heart is broken again, he thinks, he won’t be able to figure out how to put it back together again. If his heart is broken again, then there’s no way back. ‘Until I see…I will not believe…’ he says.

Lack of faith? No, rather, an overfull heart, full of love, full of longing; a heart torn apart. Grief is love with nowhere to go, and Thomas can’t just give it away now, on the disciples’ say-so. Jesus will later say ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’ Thomas has seen, and has lost, but I think has never stopped believing. *Therefore,* he needs to see for himself. As I said before, it’s a complicated question. We recognise the complexity of Jesus’s message to us, while at the same time we live in the simplicity of His love for us.

Thomas gives us permission to be ourselves within that complexity and love. He gives us permission to realise that we are broken, in our own individual ways, and (yes, I’ll say it) ‘doubting’ in all the ways that we doubt. He gives permission to question or wonder about this man in Palestine 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ, who still loves us. In the ‘Coptic Gospel of Thomas’ (which you won’t find in your standard Bible), paragraph 79, Jesus says ‘Blessed are those who have heard the word of the father, and have truly kept it.’ I think this describes Thomas well; no-one else, anywhere in John, or in any other Gospel, refers to Jesus as ‘My Lord and *my God*.’ He has kept the word well; that Jesus is *God* is Thomas’s own special understanding.

And friends, if I bang on about Thomas again in the future – and I can’t absolutely guarantee not to – that’s why.

Amen.

1. The Babel fish is a fish that, when inserted in the ear, translates from any language across the entire universe into that of the hearer. Very useful for the intergalactic traveller. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)