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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : Third Sunday after Trinity
Sunday 3rd July 2022

**JULY 3, 2022 – TRINITY 3
ST THOMAS DAY 2022**

‘We need the best person for the job’ – so proclaimed the Archdeacon recently when talking to a group of us clergy about a vacant senior post in the Diocese. And nobody disagreed. But his comment made me think. You see, I realised long ago that the Christian Church was in fact founded by weak, unbelieving and sinful men and women who seemed to let down Jesus of Nazareth when it mattered most.

Think about it. On Wednesday we remembered St Peter, the Peter who founded the Christian Church – but who was the same Peter who had denied knowing or having anything to do with this Jesus of Nazareth – not just once but three times. Then later this month we remember Mary Magdalene, the woman who had, how shall I put it in front of the children, an interesting past – yet who was one of the first to discover the risen Christ on that first Easter morn.

And today we remember St Thomas, doubting Thomas. Doubting Thomas. If you look up this phrase in the dictionary, you'll find something like: "one who habitually or instinctively doubts or questions." A "doubting Thomas" is somebody who always lags behind in matters of faith. A "doubting Thomas" always needs more proof, more time. A "doubting Thomas" has a hard time trusting others.

I ask again: can these really be the best characters Jesus had to choose from in the founding of his church? Were there no other better candidates, better people? Well of course there might well have been – but what I say is true. The Christian faith was founded through the human weakness and frailty of men and women – people like Peter and Thomas and Mary Magdalene. But, crucially, all of them were those who had been forgiven, who had been given a second chance. It is clear that they had probably learnt a very hard lesson from their past mistakes but they had come

through those dark periods and now emerged as stronger characters, people who in fact actually proved to be just the right leaders for this new religious movement.

I highlight this today because, in truth, I think we should feel highly encouraged this morning. For, in spite of our weakness, our frailty – or maybe because of it - God has chosen us to be his disciples, to be the church of today. We may, at times, feel we are not very good at it or that our efforts bear little fruit – but listen to part of a letter I received a while ago from a couple who attend here occasionally when in the area. They wrote “We are always made so welcome at Christ Church. Every aspect of the church is wonderful and we greatly looked forward to worshipping with you on a Sunday. If every Church were as good as Christ Church no-one would ever regard attending as a chore”. That sort of comment should encourage us all.

But let’s go back to Thomas. It was that first Easter Day but the disciples were staying behind locked doors. It’s not hard to understand why. Only two days earlier, Jesus had been executed. His body was laid in a tomb. He was dead. Their movement was over, with all its hopes and dreams. Saturday was a sad day. The disciples were numb. But then the first Easter morning the news began to spread, astonishing news that Jesus was alive. Mary Magdalene, Peter and John went to the tomb and found it empty. They held the empty grave clothes in their hands. Mary said later she saw Jesus alive, but she didn’t recognize him at first.

All this was too much for the disciples and they instinctively felt the need to hide behind a locked door. The thing about a locked door; it keeps people out, but it also keeps you in. You’re afraid to go outside. Outside in the streets the Festival of Unleavened Bread was going on. Jerusalem was celebrating. But the disciples couldn’t take part. They couldn’t yet trust themselves to the new reality emerging in Jesus. They were caught behind a locked door. Then Jesus appeared. They didn’t know how he got in, but there he was. He looked different, but they were able to recognize him. He was smiling, talking, wishing them ‘Peace be with you’. Their fear turned to joy at the sight of the risen Jesus.

Only one person was missing. Thomas. Later on, the disciples tried to convince him. “We have seen the Lord.” But for Thomas it was too much: “Unless I see for myself and touch the wounds myself, I won’t believe.” Thomas, so honest and real. A lot of us relate to him for we want to see and touch for ourselves. Then Jesus appears again, and he addresses Thomas. He gives Thomas all the tangible evidence he could want. Funny thing, though, Thomas doesn’t touch the wounds. Maybe seeing Jesus was enough and he exclaims, “My Lord and My God”, his profession of faith.

And look at Jesus’ response to Thomas. It’s in the form of a blessing. He says, *‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and*

yet have come to believe.' For Jesus, believing comes first. Believing leads to seeing. Believing leads to blessing. It makes sense if you think about it. Some things in life we get proof for but not everything. If we start a new relationship or a new career, we don't get to see ahead of time how it will work out. We have to believe it will, and, hopefully, over time, the proof begins to appear. The believing comes first but we have to wait patiently and see how things turn out.

There are some words from Jeremiah I discovered recently. "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." God sees our future; we don't. God is always with us and asks for our trust, our belief. So, as we indeed believe and live the life God has given us, the proof appears bit by bit. May that be so for each one of us here both today and in all that lies ahead for each of us, however our future may unfold. Amen.