

20210408 - 2nd Sunday of Easter

Acs 4.32-35; John 20.19-end

“Do not doubt but believe”

Having just expended quite some effort trying to get a book written I can identify with the writer of John’s gospel when it says “but these things are written so that ...”, because you’ve got to have some confidence that you do indeed have a good reason to be spending so much time locked-away writing.

This overriding reason for writing the gospel is given just after the account of what we always call ‘doubting Thomas’. Much ink has been spilled identifying with Thomas, apparently giving comfort to many who have questions.

But consider what the statement actually says: the book was written so that we might know that “Jesus is the son of God”, and because its me, I also like to point-out that John draws us back into the Old Testament and Israel’s hope, by stating that Jesus is the Messiah.

And the basis upon which we are called to know that Jesus is indeed the son of God, is found in this doubting Thomas account - that basis consists of the statements of the other disciples to the effect that they had seen Jesus alive. But consider this also: where had Thomas been all week? What on earth was he doing, that was so important that he hadn’t been with his friends and associates whom he’d spent the last three years with, for the last seven days?

So in a short narrative we find the two things that had tripped Thomas up. We also find the two things that will trip us up, if we act as Thomas did.

Now at this point - and yes I'm sorry - you get to become the first official group that has some of my study-leave inflicted upon them. Right before Jacob and his family go down to Egypt to escape the famine, we have one or two glaring accounts in Genesis 34 and 38, of the extended family starting to fall apart because of threatened intermarriage and assimilation with the peoples around them. One of the consequences of slavery in Egypt was that this threat never materialised because the ever-growing group of the Israelites was always kept segregated from the wider Egyptian population. That was in Genesis. For reasons which I will come to bore you with over the coming months, the book of Numbers revisits some of the concerns of Genesis, but now in the light of God being present amongst his people in the guise of the Tent of Meeting, that early form of the Temple.

It was slavery that held the people together during the time in Egypt but now in Numbers - and you can read about it in Numbers 25 - it is someones passion for the God who had rescued them, which brought people back. The threat in Numbers was the same, that people were starting to drift apart, but the remedy was different, not that they had God with them.

Rush forward into the account of Our Lord's resurrection and we can see some parallels. God had indeed truly been with us for three years; he had truly shown extraordinary love and care both towards his disciples but also towards the huge numbers of sick, hungry and oppressed people whom He had helped. For Thomas and the other disciples this was not second hand knowledge, but something they had lived through day after day after day for three whole years.

Thomas for his own reasons had decided to go the way of some of his ancient ancestors and had drifted apart from his companions. We might think this is just a matter of housing or wanting time away, but actually he was drifting away from

where God was, because Christ says quite clearly that He is in the midst of two or three of His followers. Thomas though was on His own and had moved away from God's Presence.

Not only that, but Thomas had forgotten the blessings of the past three years. Again as his ancestors had done, he had chosen to no longer bring to mind, the benefits of being with his community. It's all about rehearsing the memory.

So we might find comfort in doubting Thomas, but perhaps what we are witnessing is someone who had chosen to both forget what he'd seen and witnessed and had chosen to move away from where God was.

The message for us is plain: its as we come together in worship, in recreation, in so many ways, that Christ sets-up-camp amongst us and we are fed in our faith. Its as we remember all His many blessings, once again, our faith is built-up.

And as always, none of this is just for our own benefit, because its as we are fed by Christ, that we become that much more effective in loving and serving those he sends us to.

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