

2025 TALK, 11.5.25, (RISEN JESUS PLUS ONE SERIES), JESUS & THOMAS

JOHN 20:19-23/24-31: SEEING, TOUCHING, BELIEVING

Ever had a bad case of FOMO? FOMO stands for 'Fear Of Missing Out' of course. I remember one time, in my teens. I used to spend a lot of my time fishing with a friend called David Dowling. God used David (and fishing) to bring me to faith in Jesus. We used to fish together along the Pocklington canal. We knew there were lots of fish there, but rarely caught anything. One day I couldn't join David on one particular fishing trip. And that day - guess what?... David caught the most incredible haul of fish. Around 30 Roach, many of them over 2 pounds, which is a good size for Roach. So... you can imagine what I felt when I saw these photos of David with this big catch, & him with the biggest grin on his face. Possibly the best day's fishing ever... And I missed it...

But that's nothing compared to this. Can you imagine? The most exciting day in all of Christian history. Just three days after Jesus has been crucified. The evening of Easter Sunday - Jesus suddenly appears to his disciples gathered in a locked room... But Thomas is elsewhere... He missed out... Can you imagine what Thomas must have felt hearing second hand, about his friends seeing the risen Jesus...? Can you imagine what Thomas must have been thinking throughout the week between Jesus' first & 2nd appearances in that same room, to his disciples. He must have been thinking: 'Have I missed it? Was that my one & only chance of seeing my Messiah, Jesus, risen from the dead?' 'Doubting Thomas' is possibly history's biggest case of FOMO.

Is this why Thomas says what he does? 'Unless I put my fingers in the nail marks in his hands... Unless I put my hand in his side, I will not believe.' Was this, if you like, Thomas' way of issuing a challenge to Jesus, to try to make sure that he **didn't** miss out. That he did get to see Jesus himself? In which case, his words here are perfectly understandable... See, I'm not sure that Thomas deserves his nickname 'Doubting Thomas'. All the other disciples were equally 'doubting' until that Easter Sunday. None of them believed Jesus' previous promise to them that he would be raised from the dead, before they saw him. Just as with Thomas, Jesus makes a point of immediately showing the disciples the scars in his hands & side. Proof of his suffering. Proof of life. Proof of his victory over death. (Alleluia!) I'm sure that Thomas, like the other disciples,

would not have kept doubting, if he had seen Jesus when he first appeared. So, like I say, I'm not convinced he deserves his nickname of 'Doubting Thomas'.

That said, Thomas *is* the only one who demands to actually touch the scars of Jesus. He felt he couldn't trust the word of his fellow disciples. They all told him the same story, but he couldn't bring himself to believe. I wonder how many of us would have felt & said the same as Thomas in his situation?... Thomas is in effect, the patron saint of our unbelieving generation. The disciple who represents all those who need to see & touch things for themselves before they can believe. Thomas is indeed my 'patron saint'. He represents for me that understandable human desire – positively to experience things for yourself, not second-hand. And negatively, to ensure that you are not hood-winked & not relying just on what other people have told you.

But what matters most in this story of the risen Jesus & Thomas is this Jesus comes to Thomas in his unbelief.. Jesus invites Thomas to reach out & touch his hands, his side. I wonder, how many times, when we have prayed & only half-believed a promise of God, has God still come to us & answered our prayers... ?

Yes, Jesus encourages Thomas & us: 'Stop doubting & believe' (x2)... God calls each of us to go beyond our doubting & to grow in faith. But first, in Jesus, God meets us in our unbelief, even before our faith & our prayers are fully formed. God in Christ comes to us, reaches out to us & gently, graciously invites us to reach out to him. That's how Jesus grows our faith.

What matters most about this encounter is this... What Jesus says at the end of this story: 'Blessed are those who have not seen & yet have believed'... Do you hear Jesus' blessing over you this morning? We are blessed... Unlike the disciples who have seen the risen Jesus, we have believed without having seen. Today, God commends you for your faith, however small you may think it is. Jesus blesses you today. Jesus blesses everyone who says, with Jairus: 'LORD, I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief'...

What matters most about this story is this... That Thomas, with or without touching Jesus' scars, ends up on his knees before Jesus. And he cries out, 'My LORD & my God!' What matters is that Thomas, like the others, receives the peaceful welcome of Jesus. What Jesus brings to this crowd of worried disciples is what I like to think of as a 'Peace & scars' sandwich. First Jesus pronounces peace. Then he shows them his 'war wounds'. He shows them all the vivid

reminders of his suffering. Then - again - Jesus declares his peace over them. & he reminds them that his mission is their mission. A mission only possible with both a reminder that, like their master, they need to be 'familiar with suffering', as well as needing a double dose of God's peace & the gift of the Holy Spirit...