
That Spark that Tells Us that God is Real

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 27 April 2025

Acts 5:27-32 • John 20:19-31



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Jesus speaks these words to Thomas, when Thomas has finally overcome his skepticism and realised that Jesus is the Lord God. We are all in this boat together: we have not seen Jesus, except for a few lucky souls who may have seen visions. We have the witness of those who did see, and walk and talk, with Jesus; these are the Gospel stories we read every week. And we are blessed if we believe based on what others have told us about Jesus.

Belief is not a light thing. In today’s interconnected world, we are bombarded daily by images, opinions, and facts — this last is the most problematic, for who can tell you if a so-called fact is actually a fact or not? We are challenged by the amount of information that comes in, and we make decisions all the time to believe this or that, and not the other thing. It can be the most trivial thing, like the longest drive in golf (530 meters) or the longest song ever written (138 hours, 41 minutes, 20 seconds); or something more important, like how many

countries have nuclear weapons (9). I looked these things up online. But are they true? I don't really know. I have to judge for myself, usually using multiple sources. These are things which I can't influence, and I have no direct connection to them. They are what I would call external facts.

There are also internal facts: do I like Brussels Sprouts? (yes) or how do I feel about Brittany Spears? (not my favourite) or — do I trust in Jesus Christ? My answer to the last one is yes, but it's useful to examine one's beliefs from time to time. In that particular belief, I am not acting alone; I have divine help.

The disciple named Thomas is tested in our reading today. Dear old Thomas has come down to us through history as Doubting Thomas, who would not take the word of his fellow disciples. Why wouldn't he take their word, I wonder — after all, they have all been travelling around and about with Jesus for a few years, and they have all seen many wonderful things: healings, miracles of various kinds, the multiplication of bread and fish. They've even seen death cheated, as in the case of Jesus' good friend Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, who was brought back to life after four days in the tomb. However, coming back to life after public execution is pretty rare, so maybe dear old Thomas might be forgiven for doubting his friends' stories.

Let's look at the story again. Thomas is absent the first time Jesus appears to the disciples, and when told about it, says he must have physical proof. He must touch Jesus' wounded hands. (By the way, according to William Barclay, Jesus' feet were likely not nailed to the cross; generally only the hands were nailed, and the feet tied loosely with rope.) He must put his hand into Jesus' side, where the centurion poked him. Until he does, he won't believe. But look what happens the next time Jesus appears. Does Thomas touch Jesus' hands? Does he put his hand in Jesus' side? No, he does not. Simply seeing Jesus standing before him is enough to convince him. But why is that? You'd think Thomas would then say, "Oh, it's just a hallucination, or a daydream." Perhaps he would be like Scrooge upon seeing Marley, and blame an undigested bit of beef for the hallucination — "There's more of gravy than of grave about you, Jacob Marley!" No, there is something about Jesus that compels Thomas' belief; something inside Thomas that tells him this is real.

And I think we all have that something inside us. We really need it now, since Jesus no longer stands before us in the flesh, either in his original body or his resurrection body. We have a belief, a faith, that is planted in us by God. I believe that all people have it; but many people deny it, that spark that tells us that God is real and is with us always. Modern-day Thomases ask for proof, and *will not* believe in God — that is, they will themselves to not believe in God, ignoring that little spark of God's Spirit which is in them. Faith in God is a commitment, which deepens over time, as God develops our faith within us. For

once we choose to believe and truly hand our lives over to Christ, we are a work in progress, a work of God. God works in us to shape us into the people he always intended us to be, which we couldn't become by ourselves. God moulds us in various ways so as to be worthy of him, and more fit to share eternal life in his care.

The first step for all of us is to accept Christ in our lives, and to be baptised. Be not like Thomas, who doubted, but give thanks to God in all things, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.