

A Message from Godfrey

It is Easter evening, the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection, the day they saw the empty tomb, the day Mary Magdalene announced, "I have seen the Lord." The disciples are gathered in the house, the doors are locked with fear. A week later they are in the same place. It is the same house, the same walls, the same closed doors, the same locks. Nothing much has changed.

Jesus' tomb is open and empty, he is loose in the world but the disciples' house is closed and the doors locked tight. The house has become their tomb. Jesus is on the loose and the disciples are bound in fear. One of their number is not there when Jesus appeared to them. Thomas was not there, we are not told why he was not there or where he was, he was not there when Jesus came amongst them and greeted them by saying, "Peace be with you."

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."

It could be argued that this was the beginning of the Church as we know it because Jesus was giving them quite explicit instructions. His breathing of the Holy Spirit can be seen as a direct commissioning for them to go and forgive sins, to carry on the teachings of Jesus.

On his return, Thomas was told that Jesus had appeared to them but he found this difficult to believe,

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."

I have a certain sympathy for Thomas and I think he has been badly labelled by history as Doubting Thomas. I wonder how would we have reacted if we had been placed in the position that Thomas found himself? We do not really know much about the Twelve apart from Peter, John and Judas who feature quite often but Thomas appears three times, this being the final gospel mention, and sadly the one that has been his legacy for eternity.

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." Jesus had invited Thomas to place his fingers into the wounds on his hands and his side. The gospel does not say if he did but only that his response to seeing Jesus was to proclaim one of the great sayings of Easter, "My Lord and my God!".

Perhaps, as part of the idea that these post Resurrection appearances are the beginnings of the Church as we know it, that there is a reminder about faith in the words that followed and a reminder for the Church as to its real purpose today is to search out those who "have not seen and yet have come to believe."

We must be seen as a church that helps all to come to believe, who can help bring people to declare the words of Thomas who should be known, in my opinion as Thomas the Proclaimer who was able to proclaim, "My Lord and my God."

That should be the question that is on our lips this morning as we meet to review and plan for the future. How do we become a Church that encourages others to come along and proclaim with us those wonderful and inspiring words, "My Lord and my God."

Thoughts and prayers,

Godfrey