

The number one thing about Thomas

- the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Thomas is ...
DOUBT!

Even those who are not active Christians know the expression: "Doubting Thomas"

- doubt is never a good thing ... or is it?
yes, Thomas did doubt, or at least not accept till he had seen for himself
- and when he did see Thomas made what is certainly
the most explicit statement of faith in the New Testament:
"My Lord and My God!"
- expressing his faith this way Thomas gave Christians a prayer
that will be said to the end of time

This incident surrounding Thomas also drew from Jesus a compliment

- to all later Christians, and so to us here today:
"Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed"
- Thomas occasioned these words we can be encouraged with
that is certainly worth remembering

But wait ... there's more! - Thomas also deserves to be known for his courage

- Jesus proposed to go to Bethany after the death of Lazarus
since Bethany was near Jerusalem
this meant walking into the very midst of his enemies
and to almost certain death
- knowing this Thomas encouraged, challenged, spurred the other disciples
"Let us also go to die with him" (John 11:16)
- Thomas gave an affirmation that he would follow Jesus on that path
for that is what true disciples, true believers do:
follow, wherever, on the path Jesus goes

Later in John 14:6 Thomas asks Jesus to make that path clearer

- Jesus tells the disciples he is going to prepare a place for them
in his Father's house
and assures them they know the way
- Thomas unashamedly and unreservedly speaks up
probably putting into words what the others were thinking
but were too frightened or embarrassed to say
- Thomas fronts up to Jesus and says:
excuse me, but we don't know where you are going
so how can we know the way

These words, this question from our Thomas

- brings from Jesus wonderful words of reassurance:
"I am the way, and the truth and the life"

As one preacher has said:

... through Thomas' questioning, we as readers of the gospel, receive this gift of Christ's words for our own understanding

We, followers of Jesus over 2000 years later

- receive Jesus' words of promise, compliment and reassurance courtesy of Thomas

Thomas the disciple makes a clear statement of belief

- shows keenness to charge into danger with Jesus
is unafraid to ask questions
- these are excellent reasons to remember
and even celebrate Thomas
- rather than considering him negatively, as a "doubter"
be aware of all that we have received because of Thomas
- he is, no less than Peter, or James, or John
a true disciple

And we could stop there

- however let me take you back to our gospel reading
and in the tradition of Thomas, ask a question
- sometimes in the Biblical record
what it does *not* tell us is significant
- so my question is: "where was Thomas?"
we are simply told Thomas was not with the other disciples
when Jesus came and stood among them
- nothing at all about where Thomas was or what he was doing

Thomas is one of the twelve, *The* twelve

- and he is the only one not there
- we are told the others were all gathered together
and being afraid of the Jewish leaders had locked themselves in a room
- but there was no Thomas
why not?
where was he?
what was he doing?

I am going to read the passage from *The Message* translation

- I invite you to listen and be Thomas
you are not there
- why are you not there???
- where have you been???
- what have you been doing???
- I invite you to listen and then come up with an answer

John 20:24-29 from *The Message*:

But Thomas, sometimes called the Twin, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, "We saw the Master." But he said, "Unless I see the nail holes in his hands, put my finger in the nail holes, and stick my hand in his side, I won't believe it." Eight days later, his disciples were again in the room. This time Thomas was with them. Jesus came through the locked doors, stood among them, and said, "Peace to you." Then he focused his attention on Thomas. "Take your finger and examine my hands. Take your hand and stick it in my side. Don't be unbelieving. Believe." Thomas said, "My Master! My God!" Jesus said, "So, you believe because you've seen with your own eyes. Even better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing."

Take a moment to reflect, or talk to someone around you

- and come up with an answer
[moment or two to think, discuss etc.]
- then: invite people to share their answer

[time to give answers on behalf of Thomas ... prizes?]

Thomas was not there

- and when he did get back with the other disciples
he questioned, received an answer, and gave a great statement of faith

Here is what one Book of Saints records:

Thomas appears to have been a thoughtful if rather literal minded man, inclined to scepticism; but he was a staunch friend when his loyalty was once given. The expression "Doubting Thomas", which has become established in English usage, is not entirely fair to Thomas. He did not refuse belief: he wanted to believe but did not dare, without further evidence. Because of his goodwill, Jesus gave him a sign ... the sign did not create faith; it merely released the faith which was in Thomas already.

Thomas' honest questioning and doubt, and Jesus' assuring response to him, have given many modern Christians courage to persist in faith, even when they are still doubting and questioning.

That is Thomas

- a person whose actions, doubt, faith, questioning, courage
are highlighted as a follower of Jesus
- and what do you know, Thomas is a lot like us
and that makes a difference

Let us pray:

Christ our light,

like Thomas we need to see,

need to touch,

need to be sure before we believe.

When we don't know, help us to trust;

when we can't see, help us to keep on walking.

AMEN.