

Dear Friends,

JOHN 20: 24-31

The risen Jesus has appeared to his friends, but Thomas was not amongst them. Maybe he was out taking his daily permissible hour of exercise. He is told, "We have seen the Lord." He asks for evidence. He wants to see a proper body that he can touch, he won't be happy with a ghost. He wants that body to contain the wounds of crucifixion, otherwise it may not even have been Jesus who died, but someone else who took his place. People have sometimes frowned on the one they called "Doubting Thomas." But I like him. He thinks for himself. He asks reasonable questions. He's not just going along with the crowd.

A week later they are again in the house. This time Thomas is with them. The doors are shut, but not now locked. Perhaps the friends have managed to remember that they are no longer afraid. Jesus appears with the same greeting, "Peace be with you." He offers Thomas exactly what he requested. He shows his wounds and invites Thomas to touch them. He appeals to him, "Do not doubt but believe." And Jesus is not just talking to Thomas, he is appealing to all who read or hear this story, he is appealing to you to believe.

The writer says that planting seeds of belief is the purpose of the gospel. It says, "These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." The importance of belief was introduced in the opening verses of the gospel, there it says, "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." That verse also draws out what the writer means by belief. To believe in Jesus is put alongside receiving him. Belief is not so much about agreeing to a set of ideas about Jesus. It is much more about receiving him, being open to his presence and action, giving your consent, saying "Yes" to him.

Thomas learns that he did not need what he thought he needed. It is not necessary for him actually to touch the wounds. It is enough for him to see. He says to Jesus "My Lord and my God!" Jesus replies, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." We may think of the first-generation friends of Jesus as being particularly blessed, that it must have been special to have walked and talked with the man of Nazareth. Yes, but ... Jesus here turns to you who have not seen and yet have believed and he tells you that you too are blessed.

God bless you,

Tony