

# St. Paul's Small Groups. April 6th 2008

## Easter People: Thomas. John 20:19-end

### Word:Key points from Sunday's sermon

The first time Jesus appeared to the 10 disciples it was Sunday evening, the day of His resurrection. Everyone was there apart from Thomas (and Judas) and there may have been the women as well. The door was locked, perhaps because they feared being arrested for stealing Jesus' body. Yet there had been tales of a possible resurrection from Mary Magdalene, Peter had seen angels at the tomb and 2 disciples on the road the Emmaus said they had met Jesus (see Luke 24).

Jesus stood among them physically real, showing them his hands and side. He wanted to prove that He'd gone through the cross and all the suffering that had meant. Jesus had real scars, with real suffering, and a real bodily resurrection. He wasn't just a spirit who cannot identify with what we may go through in life, with our pain and suffering. William Temple has written, "*The wounds of Christ are His credentials to the suffering race of men....only a God in whose perfect Being pain has its place can win and hold our worship; for otherwise the creature would in fortitude surpass the Creator.*" If Jesus hadn't actually suffered, many people would have to go through more pain than God has felt, and that can't be right. Jesus knew we would need this proof, so He gives it to us as well as to the disciples.

The disciples are at last convinced and filled with joy, fulfilling Jesus' prophecy in John 16:22 that although they would be sad when He wasn't with them, they would later be filled with a joy that no-one would be able to take away. And if that in itself were not enough, after the proof of the physical resurrection came Jesus' commissioning with the gift of the Holy Spirit (v.22). This reminds us of the dry bones passage in Ezekiel 37, where the bones, even after they stand up, are still not alive until God breathes on them. Thus are the disciples made alive in Christ and equipped to go out in His name.

Thomas was committed to Jesus but he was also honest about his doubts. We see him in John 11:16 when Jesus is delaying going to visit Mary and Martha after Lazarus' illness and death. The disciples know that the authorities are after Jesus and He seems to agree not to go but then He changes His mind. The disciples are convinced that Jesus will be arrested and try to persuade Him not to go, but in the end Thomas says, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." Common sense told Thomas they should not go, but he was ready to face the danger rather than abandon Jesus. So Thomas put aside his habitual dread and followed, whatever it might bring. He must have encouraged the others, too. What counted was faithfulness, not being super-confident or winning, but being faithful, and that's true for us, too.

We see Thomas again in John 14:5 during the last Supper discourse. Thomas wasn't clear, and I don't suppose the other disciples were either, so he said, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?" This was an honest question when he didn't understand. Jesus' answer to Thomas on that occasion: He didn't point to a way that they were to follow, He answered, "*I am the way and the truth and the life*"... Without Thomas we wouldn't have had that amazing statement! Being with Jesus was and is the answer, not following some idea or precept or set of rules, but abiding with Him.

Jesus spoke directly to Thomas and had compassion for him but even so He had made him wait a whole week. Thomas' problem was not instantly solved and neither are all of ours. Yet Jesus had not forgotten him and when the time was right he answered all his doubts. But at the same time Jesus seems to rebuke Thomas: "Stop doubting and believe". Thomas wasn't an unbeliever in the sense that he'd rejected Jesus but he was in danger of refusing this *new* revelation, the physical resurrection.

In v.28, Thomas's reaction is a strong, unequivocal declaration of faith. In fact, he recognised something that some of the others probably still had not, that Jesus was God, worthy of his worship and whole-hearted allegiance. Because of Thomas, we receive a blessing from Jesus in v. 29. Jesus is blessing *us* today: we who have not seen, yet believe.

### Witness:Questions to discuss

- What difference would it make to a) the nature of Christianity, and b) your personal faith, if Jesus' resurrection was purely spiritual and not physical?
- Re-read Ezekiel 37. Compare the effect of the breathing of the Holy Spirit on the dry bones and on the disciples. If the disciples were given this gift to equip them to do Jesus' work, is it fair to say that we should not expect to receive the Holy Spirit unless we are prepared to go out and do Jesus' work?
- William Temple said this about Thomas' doubts (v. 25): "*such vigour of unbelief plainly represents a strong urge to believe, held down by common sense and its habitual dread of disillusionment...*" Why do we sometimes use "It doesn't make sense," as an excuse for a lack of faith? How might we be in danger of refusing to believe new revelations of God?
- Someone once said, "*It's better to keep quiet and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and prove it.*" Some Christians may think that to ask questions shows a lack of faith: discuss when, where and how it's OK to voice doubts, and when not.
- Use John 14:5-14 or 1 Peter 1:8-9 to lead you into worship and prayers of intercession.

