

**SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER – SERMON (John 20:19-31)**  
**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

This morning I want to ask you a question – What do *you* believe?

Here we are living in an age of specialised research which has resulted in a tremendous amount of human knowledge and innovation. We think of ourselves as people who are logical, reasonable, incapable of being fooled by what previous generations may have been taken in by. But despite all this, I don't think it's untrue to say that we are the most confused of generations.

There are many people today who look to newspapers for their horoscopes, or carry around certain objects, trinkets or charms, or who are ready to go to some fortune-teller, mystic, or psychic. For others they may simply dabble with religion. A bit of New Age, a bit of Buddha or some other New-Age guru, maybe even a bit of Jesus - but not too much!

Now remember this is not the age of pyramids and ziggurats, or gargantuan statues of deities. This is the age of stem-cell research and huge genetic advances. Yet many people in this modern age, when they face a real crisis in their lives - they actually look to **these** things!

People would rather listen to the Clare Rayners of this world, the Mystic Megs, the Russell Grants, rather than the truth. And things don't change

do they? This mentality confronted Jesus when he came on earth. And it is this same mentality that confronts the church today. There are many in our society who are not willing to listen to the truth of Jesus Christ but would rather settle for something less.

Now the evidence was there that first Easter. Whether it be Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb to find that the boulder had been rolled away, or Peter and John, not content to simply hear the testimony of Mary, but going into the tomb to see for themselves. Peter saw that the face cloth that had been laid over Jesus head was now folded up in a place by itself.

And then we are told in our gospel passage this morning that the risen Christ appeared to the apostles and many others on numerous occasions. Yet the likes of Thomas, and indeed others, would not believe until they had seen the evidence. Thomas says, '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!' (John 20, verse, 25)

And even when some people have seen the marvellous works of our Lord, they still will not believe. But this should be no surprise. Jesus healed many people, yet they did not believe and follow him. Nine out of the ten lepers didn't even return to Jesus to say thank-you. There are

people in this world no matter how many signs and wonders they see, or how much you share your faith with them – they will not believe!

In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The Rich Man cries out from Hades, ‘Send someone from the dead to visit my brothers who are still living, to warn them of this dismal place, and to repent.’

But Father Abraham says to the rich man, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’” (Luke 16:19-31)

Such irony in Jesus parables!

Jesus knew that HE would one day rise from the dead. Yet he also knew that even this sign, the sign of the risen Lord (and the first signs of the new creation), would not be enough for some. **Pause**

So I ask you the question again, the question I asked you at the beginning of the sermon. What do you believe? Do you believe that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, and that in dying he died for the sins of the world, once and for all? *You see*, either you believe it or you don't. God has given you the freedom to choose.

Well, if we look at our Gospel reading this morning, Thomas, was fortunate that the Lord did come and rescue him from his lack of faith, and a life without hope.

Thomas was one of those who insisted that he must see the evidence. And I wonder what our Lord must have thought of Thomas when he saw him that day, and indeed how Thomas thought when he saw the Lord. Thomas must have been wincing! Well, Thomas saw the evidence in the flesh and he believed in the the risen Christ. (John 20:28 – My Lord and My God!)

The basis of our faith rests on the resurrection. And the proof of the resurrection is there. The historical evidence for Jesus himself is extraordinarily good, says Bishop NT Wright. Virtually all historians of whatever background agree that Jesus did exist, and most agree that he did what he said. Now we all know that dead men do not rise again, and the people of Jesus's time knew that as well, – yet Jesus **did** rise from the grave! The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor. 15:26). and as Christ has passed through death into life, so shall all who are in him. That is what we celebrate this Easter, death has been defeated! Hallelujah! We need not be afraid of viruses and the many other things that may intimidate us.

The cross is the seminal moment of all creation. Death and decay are overcome. And this is why the cross of Jesus Christ is the centre of our faith. The resurrection is the game-changer. No one comes back from the dead unless God ordains it, for God is the Author of Life.

*The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away (Job 1:21)*

This is what the apostles celebrated that first Easter. As our Gospel writer says, 'For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that all who believe in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16)

Or as Saint Paul says to Timothy, 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of which I am the worst!' (1 Tim 1:15). Only God can get us out of the mess we find ourselves in - and he does this through his Son, our Lord and Saviour. This is our faith! This is what believe! And thank goodness, because the world is in a real mess at the moment.

Whatever you believe about the origins of this corona virus – believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again that one day you will be free from the corruption of this world. Don't doubt like Thomas, but believe!

*Well*, as I come to the end of my sermon on our Gospel passage this morning, you will notice that Jesus does not let Thomas off the hook. He admonishes Thomas when he says to him,

*'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe' verse 29.*

It is as if our Lord is saying, 'Thomas, you would have been more blessed if you had not insisted on having to see the evidence, but just believed!

And I hope that those words to Thomas are an encouragement to you.

*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe'*

Our Lord is telling us that we are more blessed than the Apostle Thomas – as we believe without having to see his hands and his feet.

Well, what in the end happened to Thomas? Tradition tells us that Thomas was not sent to the Roman empire but to the east to what is now modern day India, so after his first tentative steps as an apostle he had a great ministry. So this Easter Season, whatever stage you are at in your faith, whether you struggle with doubt like Thomas, or possibly you are like the impulsive Peter, let us not get drawn away by the world and its sophistry, or begin to start doubting as Thomas did. Instead, may we 'believe by faith' and enjoy the great blessing that comes from the Living God. **AMEN.**