

John 20: 19 – 31

'Jesus and Thomas'

In 2020 and 2021, we were not able to celebrate Easter in church. So it's lovely to be here ... but it might still feel difficult to move from Lent to Easter ... from sorrow to joy ...

Covid is still with us, we have a war in Europe and the rise in cost of living is causing concern. This piece from Debie Thomas might help:

Our Gospel story for this week – the story of the disciple Thomas encountering the open wounds of the risen Jesus – is one of the few in the three-year cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary that never changes. A mere seven days after we shout "Alleluia!" and sing, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today!" we're invited to struggle alongside "Doubting Thomas." We're invited to say the "heretical" thing we feel deep inside: "Unless I see him for myself, I won't believe." We're invited to feel wary, sceptical, and (dare we admit it?) envious. Envious of those who find faith easier to sustain than we do. Envious of those who have experienced Jesus more dramatically than we have. Envious of those who, for whatever reason, don't feel a deep cognitive dissonance between the truth of the resurrection, and the ongoing reality of death in the world.

There's a great deal to love about Thomas's encounter with Jesus, but what I love most is that Jesus appears to his sceptical disciple in a body that is scarred and wounded. A body that openly bears its traumatic history. A body that refuses to hide its suffering, its sorrow, its brokenness. What Jesus sports are not old wounds. They are wounds so raw that the doubting disciple places his fingers inside of them. Perhaps Jesus winces when Thomas touches him, but to me, the wincing signals real life, lived at a level we can comprehend. It signals real engagement. Real presence. Real pain. It speaks the very words I hunger to hear: "*I am with you.* I am with you where it hurts. I don't float thousands of sanitized feet above reality. Even after death, I dwell in the hot, searing heart of things. Exactly where you dwell."

Jesus's wounded body reminds me that some hurts are for keeps. Some markers of pain, loss, trauma, and horror leave traces that no amount of piety will take away. Some wounds remain, even after resurrection – and that's okay. It's *okay* to celebrate Jesus's rising – and grieve our catastrophic losses at the same time. It's okay to hear other people's uplifting faith stories and say, "I'm happy for you, but my heart is still broken." It's okay to ache for more of Jesus, and to hold our ache in tension with the joys of Easter.

This year – more than ever – I cherish the wounds in Jesus's post-resurrection life. On this first Sunday after Easter, even though we are a resurrection people, we are still hurting. The world is still wounded. Regardless of where on the planet we live, we are still anticipating grief on a scale most of us have never experienced before. This year, even as we gather, Jesus's scarred body speaks with great power, tenderness, mercy, and truth. Allow them to speak to you.

If you're finding the joy of Easter difficult to access right now, rest in the fact that Jesus never sheds the marks of his pain – not even when he bursts from the tomb. Contemplate the wonderful truth that ours is a religion of paradoxes: we Christians live by dying, receive by giving, rule by serving. Our job is not to collapse these paradoxes, but to honour their complexities, and live fruitfully within them. Jesus' resurrected body – his victorious body – still retains its scars.