

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
SUNDAY 8 APRIL 2018 at 10.45am

"Seeing is Believing" and "Believing is Seeing"

The nave of St. Peter's basilica in Rome is flanked by statues of the apostles, each distinguished by something with which they have become associated. We can all recognise Peter by the keys he carries (Matthew tells us that in response to Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah Jesus told him "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven") This congregation knows that Andrew's distinctive object is the Saltire – the multiplication cross. What about Thomas? He holds a T square – the essential tool of the draughtsman or architect. That strikes me as appropriate for the disciple who needed proof of Jesus' bodily resurrection. He needed to be an eye-witness.

How unfair that the phrase "doubting Thomas" has become widely used of anyone reluctant to believe a story that has gained general acceptance. I suspect that among the scientists in this congregation there are many who identify with Thomas in his demand for proof. Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hands into his side, I will not believe it." Until then, it is just an exciting theory for him, and he can't commit to it. After all, it flies in the face of the laws of nature!

"Fake news"? Media have had a field day over the chemical attack on the former Russian spy and his daughter in Salisbury. Boris Johnson is accused of jumping to conclusions too readily and blaming the Russian government. Jeremy Corbyn is slated for sising with Russia because he refused immediately to lay it at Russia's door. The balance of probability is that it was attributable to the Russian powers that be, but the oiverwhelming majority of Russian people are buying the story that it is a British government ploy to divert attention from the Brexit debacle. We are all aware that propaganda's job is to slew if not confound the truth.

Let's get back to Jerusalem and Thomas's dilemma.

There's been a whole week of animated discussion about Jesus' resurrection.

The women's tale of angels with the message "He is not here! He is risen!

Peter and John's description of the empty tomb.

Mary Magdalen "I have seen the Lord, but at first I thought he was the gardener!"

Then Jesus materialising in the locked upper room on the Sunday evening with his usual greeting of "Peace be with you" when as John tells us "the disciples were together". (not necessarily just the 10 (Judas had hanged himself and Thomas for some reason wasn't there – had he ventured out to buy food for them?

Mary, the mother of Jesus, and possibly his brother James could well have been there as well as MaryMagdalen, Salome and other women disciples in Jerusalem at the time.

John's gospel has Jesus showing his wounds as evidence.

And he re-commissions them. As the Father sent me: so I send you." He also breathes on them "Receive the Holy Spirit".

Thomas must have felt out of it, but over-reacted to the pressure the others put on him. He still insisted on seeing the evidence of the wounds for himself. Might this have been an apparition?

Then it's another Sunday evening, this time Thomas is with them.
I'm going to let Dorothy Sayers take over

"The Man Born to Be King" Final Play Scene 4.....

"Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed."

John saw the empty grave – he "saw and believed".

Thomas saw the crucifixion marks but didn't need to touch them – he "saw and believed".

"My Lord and my God!" Identification of the risen Christ with God -

key to development of the early Church, especially in Paul's writings.

Church was to prove that believing without physically seeing was possible.

Trusting in Christ enabled you to see life and death more clearly.

The community inbreathed with the Holy Spirit was able to fulfil its mission.

"See how these Christians love one another!" Example of French policeman substituting himself for a woman in the supermarket siege. Self-sacrifice in struggle for justice and peace in all kinds of ways. The Church must always witness to the reality of the new and eternal life we are offered and can share in through Christ's death and resurrection. This is the gospel! This is the good news for the world!

Jenny Carpenter