

commitment to love

a sermon preached on the
2nd Sunday of Easter

12 April 2015

at

st john's

ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL

by fr david moore, vicar

the lections: Acts 4.32-37 Psalm 133, 1 John 1.1-2.2 , John 20.19-31

“Unless I see the mark of the nails, and see the wound in the side, I will not believe”. It has never made sense to me to talk of ‘doubting Thomas’ in this Easter Two gospel story. This strikes me as a misunderstanding of the risen Lord’s saying: “Do not doubt, but believe”.

Crucially, it’s a mistake to construct ‘doubt’ as the opposite of ‘belief’: for in fact the opposite of belief (faith) is certainty. And certainty is not actually faith at all – only a variant of success doctrine. ‘Faith’ in the risen Lord is neither success doctrine nor certainty religion. Faith is the hope for things not seen – that which cannot be proved by signs and wonders.

So when I meditate upon Thomas’s reaction to his companions’ news about the risen Lord I do not hear the voice of a person lacking in faith. Quite the opposite in fact. I hear a voice of a deep longing which goes far beyond what can be called ‘certain’, the voice of a person entirely focussed and centred in a deep yearning for encounter.

It is striking that the disciples who have supposedly ‘seen’ the risen Lord simply report that they have *seen* something – they’ve had the experience but have not grasped the meaning. Whereas Thomas’ cry ‘My Lord and my God’ is the voice of someone entirely given over to the deep ache for experience of the Divine. Thomas has gone well beyond mere seeing – to the depths of the experience’s meaning. It is faith that enables us to move beneath the surface detail of the mere experience – to the depth of the meaning.

So on this one day of the year when something is said specifically about money and our pledge of commitment to the life of the parish, I am grateful for Thomas’ spiritual companionship. Thomas is our companion who assists us to see much more than the experience of mere envelopes and forms and money and budgets – as necessary and helpful as all these are – to the deeper meaning of the experience.

As I have written in today’s Contact, I do not intend to actually say much about money per se, though there are two matters worth highlighting: the importance of being ready for next Sunday, by completing our Commitment forms at home today, if we have not already done so; and the biblical principle and spiritual value of our offering being of our ‘first fruits’, not the leftovers at the end of the month or at the bottom of our pockets after we’ve paid for everything else.

The Thanksgiving booklet which has been made available to us all contains information about the parish’s financial requirements – also a theological reflection on the meaning of Thanksgiving for the Eucharistic community. It is a fairly obvious fact that the mission and ministry of St John’s requires our financial contributions – everyone knows that, and it hardly needs spelling out.

But the central issue for us at Thanksgiving is not financial – it’s primarily a spiritual issue. The question before us at Thanksgiving is not so much ‘What does the parish budget need?’ – though we don’t ignore that very real and practical matter; any more than we would ignore the practicalities of our own personal and household budgets. The question that matters is this: ‘What is *my need* to give?’ When we get this matter correctly prioritised we find that everything falls into place.

My need to give has its deepest roots in the Incarnation. In this great doctrine we see that God’s need to give of Godself is expressed in the act of creating – through ongoing incarnation of the Divine love. As we are especially aware in Eastertime, the Divine love empties itself – not grasping at its ‘rights’, but giving of itself, even to death on a cross. The grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies bears much fruit! As those made in the image and likeness of God, this is our deeply rooted humanity.

When this divine self-emptying potential is blocked up in us we become sick – self-centred instead of self-giving. When this divine potential is activated – when this potential is liberated in us

through self-emptying – then we discover that we receive much more than we could ever have imagined. A generous measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over. The Divine self-emptying returns with wounded hands and side – to liberate and reconcile and bless beyond imagining.

Thus, when we present our completed Thanksgiving Commitment pledges at the Altar at next Sunday's Patronal Feast Eucharist we are not primarily funding a parish budget – though we do have a responsibility to do exactly that. But the deeper truth which will be sealed inside our Commitment forms next Sunday will be our commitment to the self-emptying, non-grasping Divine love to whom, with Thomas, we cry out: "My Lord, and my God!"

This deep cry of yearning – expressed in a very tangible and practical way in our Commitment forms – is only possible through faith. And not faith in anything we ourselves might do or accomplish – but faith in the Divine Love whose life is pure grace; whose Love is manifest in the blessing of wounded hands and pierced side, that all may have life abundantly.

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