

"There is a little bit of Thomas in all of us"

Colin Brown (That You May Believe) tells the delightful story of the King of Siam who was talking to the Dutch ambassador. This took place back in the seventeenth century. He was enthralled by the stories of life in far-off Holland. Everything was going all right until the ambassador began to tell the King about winter in Holland and how water would get so hard that an elephant could walk on it. The king who had lived his entire life in the tropics replied, "Hitherto, I have believed the strange things you have told me, because I look upon you as a sober fair man; but now I am sure you lie."

The King of Siam struggled to believe the Dutch ambassador that an elephant can walk on ice. It was not part of his reality, his world view and so it seemed to him to be completely unbelievable.

Thomas was challenged with something just as unbelievable: Jesus had risen from the dead. He had seen Jesus tortured and nailed to the cross. He had seen this before when the Romans had crucified criminals. No one escapes this. People end up dead and Jesus was no exception.

So when he hears from the other disciples that Jesus is alive, he demands proof.

But Thomas is not the only one who struggles with the idea that Jesus is alive. All the other disciples struggle with the same idea.

The gospel story begins on the first day of the week. The disciples were together but the doors were locked for fear of the Jews. Jesus appears to them coming through the locked doors. As a locked tomb with a stone in front could not contain Jesus, so a locked door was easy for Jesus.

He appears to the disciples and they were taken aback. But his word of peace convinces them as does the hand and sides that this is no ghost but the real deal. It is Jesus, alive and well and in front of them.

He offers them three things His peace, His presence and His power.

Peace: What is this "peace" that Jesus is offering? It is a description of a type of relationship between people rather than a personal inner tranquillity. The verbal form [*eireneuo*] always refers to relationships between people in the NT (Mk 9:50; Ro 12:18; 2C 13:11; 1Th 5:13). It is clear in John 16:33 that peace does not mean "not having troubles in the world" -- which would tend to rule out the meanings

eirene

adopted from the Hebrew

shalom

. A third meaning of

eirene

which may apply here is that it becomes synonymous with messianic salvation, since "peace" is an essential quality of the messianic kingdom. We have peace with God as Paul writes in Romans 5:1.

What Jesus was offering was a new relationship with God, with himself and with his disciples who basically walked away from him.

Presence: The act of breathing upon the disciples and the words of invitation to receive the Holy Spirit was His gift to them. This is similar to the Pentecost story of Luke in Acts where the disciples had to wait to receive the Spirit. The same word is used in Genesis 2:7 where God breathes the breath of life into the nostrils of the man and he becomes a living being. It is used in Ezekiel 37:9 where the breath breathes on the slain [the dry bones], so that they may live. It is also used in Wisdom 15:11c where God "breathed a living spirit into them."

But this presence was to empower them to continue the ministry of Jesus. "As the father sent me, so I send you" The presence of God is an empowering presence to do the work of ministry. It is not just for our personal edification and enjoyment!

Power: The third thing that Jesus gave them was power, his power. But note that it was not power to perform miracles though Jesus and the disciples did perform miracles. It was the power to forgive sins. This is what truly upset the scribes and Pharisees. For in their eyes the only person who could forgive sins was God. In Jesus forgiving sins he was claiming to be God. Jesus bestows that same power to the disciples. They were not God as Jesus was, but they were given the power to act as if God was acting through them. In days of old, the messenger of the king was given the King's signet ring and he could ask and get anything because of that ring. The messenger was the King because he had the ring! So the disciples were given that same power as God has: to forgive sins.

This power to forgive sins is at the heart of the gospel. While healing and miracles are great, they do not last forever. People still die! But when you forgive sins, relationships are restored and they never die, especially the relationship with God which only forgiveness of sin can achieve.

Thomas was not with them when Jesus showed up. He did not believe their testimony.

"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"

Next Sunday when the disciples had gathered and the doors were locked, Jesus again appears to Thomas. He offers Thomas peace: a new and restored relationship with Him. Jesus shows the hands and sides and challenges Thomas to put his pinky in the hole!

Jesus says "Do not doubt but believe". Actually the Greek does not say this. Thomas has been maligned all these years as Doubting Thomas.

Although many translations include "doubt" in v. 27 -- and thus lead to the phrase "Doubting Thomas", there is no Greek word for "doubt" in the verse! The contrast is between *apistos* and *pistos*

-- the only occurrence of both these words in John. The prefix "a" as in

apistos,

means "not" or "without". For instances, in English, "amoral" means "without morals". "

Apistos

" means "without
pistos
."

Pistos means

- pertaining to trusting -- *one who trusts in, trusting*
- pertaining to being trusted -- *faithful, trustworthy, dependable, reliable* pertaining to being sure, with the implication of being fully trustworthy --
sure

apistos would be "not having trust or faith or certainty."

The biblical laments indicate that questioning God is an aspect of faith. If one is asking God questions or seeking answers from God, there has to be some kind of faith that God exists and can respond. Thomas' questioning, his desire to be sure (a meaning of *pistos*), can be commended as an aspect of faith in God.

We all identify with Thomas. Before we can believe, we want to be certain; we want to see. There are many times when we question what has been said about God and His ways. We want to see for ourselves. There is a little bit of Thomas in all of us.

Besides the possible meanings of *pistos/apistos*, we need to also look at the verb in this line: *gi nou* (with the negative *me*).

- Do not become unbelieving, but believing
- Do not become unfaithful, but faithful.
- Do not become uncertain, but certain.

Thomas seems to be at a crossroads in his life. What will he become? What adjective will describe him: trusting or not, faithful or not, certain or not?

For many of us, we are like Thomas, at the cross roads of belief where we will become a believer or not. This is not just about the first time that you believe in Jesus but it becomes a motif over our life as we walk with Jesus and follow up.

Liz and I faced a cross road with her cancer. Will we believe that she will be healed or not. Will we trust? Will we have faith especially when the prognosis is not good? Will we continue to have faith when she got worse rather than better? Will we believe and hope or give up and be in despair waiting for the end to come.

We will all face many cross roads of belief where we will be asked the question; "Do you believe that Jesus can do it i.e. be raised from the dead, use you to start a ministry, use you to heal the sick, transform a person's thinking, transform an impossible situation at work or in the family?

Will we have faith? Will we trust? Will we be certain? Will we be faithful?

Jesus replies with the punch line for Thomas and all that is Thomas within us. "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"

John rams home the point. These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in His name.

The issue for Thomas and all of us is that he did not believe the word, the testimony of the disciples. He did not believe that what they said was true. It had to see it for himself before he believed. But the blessedness of God is for those who believed but not be able to see. They believed the word of another who had seen.

Thomas had to become a true believer! And so do we!

It is not about seeing to believe for many people saw the miracles of Jesus but refused to believe that He was who he said he was. It about believing even though you cannot see the wood from the trees, the light from darkness, the door out of the maze, or feel that God is close. We have to believe what has been said and written and not what we have seen or not seen.

We have to believe the words and experience of others about God even though it has not been our experience yet! We have to believe what has been written in the Book from those who did see: walk and talk with Jesus.

Like Thomas, we want the hard facts before we commit ourselves but life with God is not like that. It is about believing the words of others even if we were not there in the flesh. It is about trusting in the One whom we can't see but has written it down to help us to believe.

Many years ago, a weary traveller hiked for miles across the desert with the hot sun beating down on his back. His water supply was gone, and he knew that if he didn't find water soon to quench his thirst, he would surely die.

In the distance, he spotted a deserted cabin which brought hope that maybe water was to be found there. He made his way to the cabin and discovered an old well. He frantically pumped the handle of the well to draw water but all that came from the pump was dust.

Then he noticed a tin can tied to the pump, with a note inside that said:

Dear stranger:

This pump is all right as of June 1952. I put a new sucker washer in it and it it should last for a few years. But the washer dries out and the pump needs to be primed. Under the white rock, I buried a jar of water, out of the sun and corked up. That's enough water in it to prime, but not if you drink some first. Pout about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the water into the pump and let it soak for a minute to wet the leather washer. Then pour the rest medium fast and pump hard. You'll get water. Have faith.

This well has never run dry.

When you get watered up, fill the bottle and put it back as you found it for the next stranger who comes this way.

Desert Pete.

What would you do? Believe the word of Desert Pete or drink the water.

For the stranger at the well, for Thomas and for us is about becoming a true believer based on not we have seen but trusting in what has been written.

In the end Thomas became a true believer? How about you?

Walking Free: God continues to being people in need of a deep healing by God. We have had some complex people with variations of witchcraft and programming along with people with abuse from childhood. We have also ministered to children under 12. But God is gracious and people are getting better. We are grateful to Diane who works Tuesdays with me and Liz works with me on Thursdays.

Bible Studies: We continue to study the gospel and Mark where some of the church along with clients come for Bible Teaching. Mark is also studied up to Easter. Look for my sermons on the website if you are interested.

Finances: We are blessed to have our supporters. Their support and the income from clients funds me .25 stipend plus super and insurance. We are blessed by everyone.

Walking Free Renewing Ministries Gift Fund

BSB 084-961 ACC 82-215-5845.

Use your name if you would like a tax receipt at the end of the financial year.

Praise God for His provision.

- **Thank God for the healing and restoration He is bringing to our clients.**
- **Pray for more finances to support Walking Free Ministry**

- **Pray for team in Adelaide who pray for the ministry: Margaret, Lesley, Diane, Valda and Tim.**
- **Please pray for team at Toowoomba: Hal and Debbie.**

Family Life. Life has been challenging in recent months with Liz's car grazed by a shopping trolley to the tune of \$1500 damage. We had to pay a \$500 excess. Our granddaughter,

Jennifer, pulled the birdbath at our place and cut her eyebrow that needed plastic surgery. Our daughter Jessica has had an ear virus that has fatigue as a consequence which has put her out of action for a few months.

We have celebrated birthdays each month. Emily is now 1. Liz and I go away for 3 weeks to France and Greek island of Lesbos for a well earned holiday and break.

Pray for Naomi, Jonathan, Jennifer and Emily; David, Maddy and Elijah and Gabriel; Jess

Church: Hawthorn continues to struggle especially when key older people have health issues and have reduced their input. We have some people move on as well. But God knows the future and we wait on Him.

India: We continue to support our friends in India with their outreach and local ministry. We gave money for them to celebrate Easter with their church and family.

Pray for the work of the gospel in India with Pastor's Devadas, C H (his brother) and Rev Sambabu. Pray for their families.

Kenya: Liz and I are giving monies to buy 4 computers and 3 solar panels so that my sermons can reach the pastors. They also use the computer to show the Jesus film. The cost is \$2200 dollars.

If you would like to donate towards this project, please transfer money into

NAB *BSB*: 084-618 Acct No: 19-345-8260 Rev John Lucas.

Pray for Pastor Newton , his pastors and people in Homa Bay and Garissa. Pray for their families.