

Many of you will know that I was flattened by a virus for well over a fortnight, and lost the whole of Holy Week and Easter. I think I'm being a good boy and taking it step by step, and I'm grateful for all your prayers and good wishes. I have never felt as rotten as I did over the Palm Sunday weekend. If you've been ill, and recovered, you'll know how easy it is after the event to tell your story as one with a beginning, middle and end. You can pinpoint the bad times, and the moments when you know a corner was turned. It's the same for any traumatic or exciting experience. But when you're in the middle of it – in my case feeling like death and eating ice cream at 3 in the morning – you don't really know what the story is, or what is going to happen next. You just are – frightened, bewildered, shaken.

That's the situation in which Jesus's followers find themselves after the resurrection. Look carefully at the Gospel accounts. None of them say that, after the women tell them Jesus is alive, they all go: 'Oh excellent. Just like he said. We believe it all now. Let's go out and save the world'. All of that comes weeks, months, even years later. Even after Jesus appears to them, none of them have a clue what to do. In Mark's Gospel they run away because they are afraid. In Matthew some doubt even as they look at Jesus. In Luke they are frightened and disbelieving in Jesus's presence. In John they are in such a muddle that they go back to what they used to do, and head out to fish. They are in the middle of something that they don't understand, and they don't know where it's going. They are frightened, bewildered, shaken.

Jesus, in John's telling, doesn't help much. He shakes them up even more – blowing the wind of the Spirit on and in to them, stirring them up like a leaf blower in the autumn. One of them is absent at the time, and thank the Lord for that. Thankfully too, it's Thomas. He was the one of the twelve who asked questions, who checked things out. Elsewhere in John's Gospel it's Thomas who asks the questions: when Jesus says to them that they know the way to the place where he is going, it's Thomas who says that if they don't know his destination they won't know the way. Forget associations with doubt here. After all it's Thomas who is keen to follow Christ even to death, when Jesus tells them what will happen to him in Jerusalem.

In the middle of fear and bewilderment and upheaval, it's Thomas who asks careful questions, tries to get a foundation and a handhold. He looks for things he can grasp. That's not doubt, that's checking things out. And then look what happens. When Jesus blows in and stirs things up again, rather than being frightened and perplexed Thomas responds to the risen Christ, with worship: 'my Lord and my God.' It's the next step that Jesus's followers have to take: in Luke, later, they take that worship into the Temple, knowing that the risen Jesus who shares meals with them is the embodiment of the God they adore. Thomas models the first response we make to the news that Jesus has been raised from the dead. We worship. Let belief and the answers to the other questions follow.

And it is in Thomas that we see the next steps too. After the ascension and the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost the leaf blower of the Holy Spirit blows Thomas thousands of miles. Well attested sources of the early Church attribute to Thomas the only missionary journey beyond the Roman Empire – through Parthia and Mesopotamia, to the establishment of the Christian church in India. There is a denomination in South India now called the Mar

Thoma – Saint Thomas Christians. The earliest veneration of Thomas starts in India. If you want to see Thomas depicted among the saints, look for an architect's T square: he was reputed to have built his own cathedral. Think of Thomas as someone who asked questions, and whose answers were proved them to be true by his actions and the offering of his whole life. How did the new Christians of India know that the Gospel was true? Because of Thomas's life. As Jesus said to him: "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe."

How do we know that the resurrection is true? In the words of the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, how do we know that the last enemy, death, has been destroyed? Because the love of God is at work in us today, because we continue to inhabit the resurrection story. There are many ways that people have tried to convince others of the need for belief and the proof of the existence of God. But the most persuasive is, it seems to me, the life of the Church, the vibrancy of worship, the action of love, the service of others. If Christ died for us then we should lay down our lives for each other. Other people will know that God is at work in the world when we show it – through worship, through acts of love, through genuine service, through radical following of God's call, through our excited speaking of God's goodness and presence with us at every turn.

Thomas, convinced of the resurrection, filled with the Spirit, was blown by the Spirit further than anyone else. Just as the Church of Rome looks to Peter, Indian Christianity looks to Thomas as the one who, by the Spirit, started it all. If you are unsure of what you believe, unsure that you could ever do anything to make God plain to others, unsure that God could ever use you, then take heart from Thomas. He starts, like them all unsure where the story is going, and frightened. He questioned, he checked it out. He met the risen Christ and worshipped. He put things in place in his mind and heart, and then he found himself putting it into practice. God has done the same for you. Jesus meets us here in his risen power. The Spirit is at work among us. We are invited to respond in worship – 'my Lord and my God'. We are invited to continue to check it out. And then who knows where the leaf blower of the Spirit will send us.