

# The Diversity of Creation ...

## *... the diversity of God's people*

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*A sermon given on the Third Sunday of Trinity 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2022 by the Associate Vicar the Revd Wendy Wale in Beverley Minster*

*Ephesians 2:19-end; John 20:24-29*

So let's talk about [*Wendy lists some flower names*]

Some of you will know exactly what I'm talking about. Anybody? Flowers. Fantastic. Some of you will know what they look like. Some of you will know how to grow them. Others of you will have put them in an arrangement sometime last week so that people could come and admire them. Because apparently, according to my top level consultant, these are all types of flower that you can see in the minster today as part of our incredible Flower Festival. Please do not ask me which is which afterwards, because I have no idea, as you can probably tell from my pronunciation. People with knowledge, experience, talent and skills that I do not possess have transformed this already beautiful place into something breathtaking and awe-inspiring. I was here throughout the week, particularly on Thursday night and Friday, and everybody I spoke to was enjoying something different, appreciating the works of art, the flowers or the tea and cake. Except for one person, who shall remain nameless: despite having spent lots of time helping out and appreciating the scale and reach of this event reflected in their own words, they told me, "I just don't get it. It's just some flowers." [*Nameless - and my husband said, "They're going to think it's me straight away." - and it wasn't him!*]

Today in the church, we remember Thomas. Thomas, who is often remembered as the disciple who just didn't get it. There were the disciples who had seen and spoken with the resurrected Jesus and they got it; there were the disciples who had heard about the resurrected Jesus and they accepted it; and then there was Thomas, 'It's just flowers. Dead men don't rise. I don't get it. I need to touch and see and feel before I even begin to change my mind.'

I love Thomas (and I am still talking about the Apostle, although obviously I love the Thomas I'm married to as well. He made me say that. No, I do indeed.) Whilst Thomas is the patron saint of doubters, I think he's actually more complex than that.

Each of us here will have different reaction to flowers, and not just those who sneeze a lot: we have those who know the Latin names; who understand the growing conditions, the seasonality and what flourishes where; we have those who understand the colour and shape and can create beautiful arrangements with flair and imagination; those who have gardens and allotments full of beautiful flowers, trees, fruit and vegetables; and those like me who haven't a clue but think they're marvellous.

Similarly, each of us encountered Jesus in vastly different ways. Some of us will have grown up with faith. We've attended church all our lives, and the creeds, the hymns, the liturgy, the scriptures are deeply ingrained within us. Others of us may have come to face after a long intellectual journey with questions, conversations, reading, thinking, pondering, discussing, all the way. Others still, I know, have had a dramatic encounter with Jesus. Perhaps a healing, a rescuing from an addiction or a serious mental health crisis; perhaps an overwhelming feeling of love or peace at a critical moment in life.

I hope that there are some here today who, like Thomas at the start of our reading, are still trying to work things out. You're in church, you're around Christians, you may be watching online, but you haven't yet felt that solid conviction that this is something you'd give your whole life to.

Jesus knows exactly what Thomas is thinking and feeling. He walks into the room and he offers his peace. He then turns to Thomas and invites him to reach out and experience the very proof he needed. *"Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand. Put it in my side. Don't doubt, but believe."* This is the moment when the penny drops and Thomas cries, *"My Lord and My God."* There is something incredibly powerful about Thomas's honesty - his refusal to simply accept without question his genuine seeking and searching.

God knows each of us this morning. He created our difference and diversity. God built variation and contrast into every living thing - flowers, animals, trees, insects and people. The reading we heard from the letter to the Ephesians and many others like it, makes it clear that the church is the collection, the arrangement, of every sort of person: we are not all musicians; not many of us are great with technology (if you've seen the scrabbling this morning, some of us wish we were even better!); some of us can scale heights to fix pinnacles and change light bulbs; to put high

level flower arrangements up there (I don't know how they got them there); others can bake cakes and make a mean cup of tea; some can listen deeply; and others offer practical care. Each one of us will hear and understand scripture in different ways and enjoy different styles of worship. The church is not complete without everyone, each uniquely made and with different gifts. Just as the flowers are placed carefully in the structures, as well as growing wild in the sanctuary garden and my garden, we are called to grow together, spiritually, into the dwelling place for God, members of the household of God, along with the saints.

May we seek to appreciate one another in all our glorious differences. May we know that we are loved and valued just as we are. May we find ways to allow each person to find their place in the family of faith, in their joys and struggles, certainties and doubts, to display the full spectrum of God's glory to a watching world.

## Reading Texts

### **Ephesians 2:19 end**

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God,<sup>20</sup> built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.<sup>21</sup> In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord;<sup>22</sup> in whom you also are built together spiritually\* into a dwelling-place for God.*

### **John 20:24-29**

*<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin\*), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, '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.'<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.'<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'*