

Thomas – the fruit of the resurrection

John 20. 24-29

[1 John 3. 13 – 24]

Thomas – July 3 2011 [BCP Trinity 2]

Some saints are elusive. We don't know that much about them. With St Thomas the Apostle we are on safer ground, but even so he's difficult to pin down. If you look in the BCP his day is December 21 – and in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century that's where he was inserted into the Roman Calendar. But July 3<sup>rd</sup> was also a possibility – the date his relics were placed in a church in Edessa in modern day Turkey. Some churches in the East celebrate him on October 6, and some on June 30.

Perhaps Thomas goes well with a bit of confusion. After all, his name is a by word for doubt, following his inability to take the word of the other disciples for what it was when he missed out on meeting the living Jesus after his resurrection. And it's Thomas who elsewhere in John's Gospel asks the awkward 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. But that's a bit unfair. It's Thomas who is keen to follow Christ even to death, when Jesus tells them what will happen to him in Jerusalem. And it's Thomas who, rather than being frightened and perplexed when he meets the risen Christ, responds in worship: 'my Lord and my God.'

And it is in Thomas that we see remarkable fruit after the ascension and the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. Well attested sources of the early Church attribute to Thomas the only missionary journey beyond the Roman Empire – through Parthia and Mesopotamia, and the establishment of the Christian church in India. There is a denomination in South India now called the Mar Thoma – Saint Thomas Christians. Very early sources place him in India, and the earliest veneration of Thomas starts there. I prefer to think of Thomas as someone who asked questions, and he found them answered he 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 is 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 John, our Epistle reading tonight, how do we know that we have "passed from death to life"? because the love of God is at work in us today. In John's terms, because we "love the brethren." 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. John asks how we can say we love each other if we don't help each other. 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 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. John tells us that we will know that God is at work in us by the knowledge and experience of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. 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 questioned, he checked it out, 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’. And then who knows where the Spirit will blow us.