
¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'.... ²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as 'The Twin'), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.' ²⁶ A week later His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' ²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe.' ²⁸ Thomas said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' John 20:19, 24-29 (NIV)

What does it mean to 'trust someone'? What does it mean to 'trust', or to find someone as 'trustworthy'?

When it comes to this notion of 'Trust', we know it is important at many levels... We also know that it is very multi-layered 'concept'. Trust is defined as the "assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something". It is also "dependence on something future or contingent (hope)". It is also "a property interest held by one person for the benefit of another."

We also know (at many levels –cognitively and emotionally) that Trust is the foundation for any relationship. Trust is one of the most critical elements of healthy relationships, families, teams, organisations and communities. Trusting someone means that you think they are reliable, you have confidence in them and you feel safe with them physically and emotionally. Trust is something that two people in a relationship can build together when they decide to trust each other.

It is sometimes said that Love cannot exist without Trust; they need to go hand in hand. Certainly a long lasting relationship is easy to establish if the spirit of love and trust are instilled at the very beginning. The ability to open up and give yourself to someone is because you can trust them... Trust is the implied value of a genuine and caring and loving relationship.

Much is written and explored in the area of 'psychology' on the topic of 'trust'. At a personal relationship level, we know that 'trust' is important. Even neuroscientists study 'trust' to determine how the brain works in this regard (when a person has a sense of 'trust' it is related to the release of hormones such as 'oxytocin'). In business and work environments 'trust' is very important for a healthy organisation in terms of long-term morale, efficiency, and the well-being of all concerned. It is easy to have a business place function relatively well using fear and compliance or events that are designed to target a person's emotions (which some have described as 'golden handcuffs'). But for the long-term well-being of any organisation (as any personal relationship), a culture of trust is seen as a key element of what makes a meaningful difference.

One could spend a very long time reflecting on this theme of 'trust'. One could explore the literature on 'trust' in the psychological field and even explore those areas of organisations that speak about 'gaining trust' (which sometimes is the exact opposite of it – but rather more like psychological techniques for manipulating behaviour). One could also explore what 'trust' is all about in our current COVID-19 world – and how trust plays out in respect for those in authority (And consider the extremes to be dealt with... Some people are clamouring for some full 'lockdown', or the mandatory use of face-masks or the like. On the other side there are those arguing for a wind-down of some restrictions). We can also learn much from these times in terms of how people respond to various 'authorities', and the way perhaps we may also emotionally respond.

And one could also explore that area of if you have ever felt 'trust' as 'betrayed', and how this has affected you? One could also in this space if such 'trust' was actually 'betrayed', or if there a perception of 'reality' in your own 'self' which misunderstood events around you? (Someone once said, 'Be careful of half-truths because you might have the wrong half'. Do you have all the 'facts' correct?).

What is 'trust'? Thinking broadly, what is 'trust' from a sociological, psychological, philosophical, economical, or systems-theory approach? And how is 'trust' related to areas such as intimacy, credibility, living in a digital age, as also in areas such as behavioural sciences such as attachment theory?

What is trust for you? How does it 'work' for you? How is it important? How do (did) you learn to trust someone? Have you ever felt a 'trust' betrayed? And what should we do when we feel a 'trust' is 'betrayed' or 'misplaced'?

Today, of course, as we are a week after Easter (and the actual anniversary of these Bible events of John 20:26-29), we can reflect on the area of 'trust' as we hear of the one often known as 'Doubting Thomas'. What happens here? On that first Easter day, Jesus appears to His disciples. And the first thing He says is "Peace be with you." This is understandable. The disciples had thought Jesus was dead. And so Jesus had to calm their fears (perfectly reasonable, as you don't expect to see someone who had died). Jesus shows them His hands and side as a 'proof' of His words, and again says "Peace be with you". Then Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit upon them, and commissions them for His work. There is much to ponder at many levels on the theme of 'trust'.

Then the disciples tell Thomas (one of the 'Twelve', who had been absent from them that first Easter evening – and we aren't told why Thomas was absent). Thomas does not believe the other disciples, although there were many witnesses (and their words were also in accord with Jesus' earlier words about how the Son of Man had to suffer and die and on the Third Day be raised from death, eg: Matthew 16:21–28; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; Mark 9:30–32; Luke 9:22–27, etc).

Thomas instead demands the same 'proof' the other disciples received – to see Jesus' hands and side (note John 20:20: Jesus' earlier 'proof' to His disciples). One could say that Thomas didn't 'trust' his friends... And maybe he didn't 'trust His Lord' (good question to consider... because how much are we like Thomas... and we need to be honest with ourselves here....)

And we know what happens next... A week later after Jesus had first appeared to His disciples, Jesus came and stood among them and Thomas was with them. Jesus said to them, 'Peace be with you!' Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side." Stop doubting and believe." Thomas then made that amazing confession of faith: "My Lord and my God!" And then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

There is much in the 'trust' area to consider here, including in our person-to-person-relationship-levels. And it would be easy to 'psychologise' and 'moralise' this incredible encounter (saying what we 'should be doing', and reflecting on how the various disciples did react... Or how we perceive they reacted...). And we could say things like "Thomas is a good *example* in many ways. He refused to say he understood when he didn't; he refused to pretend to believe when he didn't. And when he did understand and believe, he went all the way and properly called Jesus Lord and God."

And so we could also reflect on the themes common to most normal human-beings: doubt and faith and trust and commitment... We could also reflect on themes of how we may cope when we are discouraged because things do not seem to go the way we believe they should. And we could reflect on the question of 'What is reality?' (Especially given that we live in a mixed-up 'reality-TV' world, where things are really not that real, and so-called 'reality-TV', or the lives of 'influencers', seem to focus on insignificant goals and the trivial...).

The account of the Thomas's encounter with the risen Lord Jesus gives us an opportunity to reflect on the theme of 'faith' and trust'. And here we are reminded that the 'reality' of some thing is not determined by the 'subject' (Thomas) but by the 'object' (Jesus; and the reality of His resurrection; and the reality that He is 'Lord' and 'God'). Your personal 'faith' does not change the reality of Jesus' existence, or the actuality of His bodily resurrection. You are here today because of the actual and bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead.

And yet, like Thomas, we may have 'doubts': 'doubts' in terms of its actuality (that Jesus truly rose from the dead), and 'doubts' about what this means for our lives. Thomas 'doubts'... He is human. Doubt is common to all. And lest we be too harsh on Thomas, remember that just prior to Jesus entering Jerusalem before the crucifixion, it was Thomas who said, "Let us go with Him that we may die with Him." And it was Thomas who was brave enough to ask, "Lord, where are You going?" that led to Jesus words that He is 'The Way, The Truth, and The Life' (John 14:1-5) And so here is Thomas, who is an incredible mixture of doubt and faith. And here is the risen Lord Jesus bringing transformation into his life...

Do you often feel as though you just need a sign from God to really put your trust in Him? Do you ever feel that if you just had a visible sign from Jesus, you would be a much stronger, faith-filled, bold person? Do you ever find yourself feeling a little frustrated with this whole Christianity thing because it is so unseen and intangible? If only there was proof. If only I had a direct line to Jesus. If only we had a sign for all to see that we really are on the right horse and that the future will really be okay.....We probably all feel all these things from time-to-time.

If you are struggling to live with any certainty about Christianity and your place in the church, follow Thomas. Place your mind and soul in Christ, and find that by His word you are enlightened... If you consider yourself a hard nut to crack, and have often thought that you would like to believe but just cannot, there is only one way to find faith, and that is to put it somewhere – to put faith in this Word and absorb it so that you can say “My Lord and my God!”

Last week (Easter Sunday), we celebrated the news of the Resurrection. This week, we reflect on the mystery and its implications for our lives. Last week, we heard from those who saw Jesus risen on that first Easter Day. This week, we hear of those who did not see, at least initially (such as Thomas), and yet, as Peter puts it, “believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8). Last week, we were hearing and saying together in worship, perhaps repeatedly, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” This week we are hearing, and called to join in, Thomas’s pronouncement: “The risen Christ is Lord and God.”

From a logical-human-point-of-view, Thomas’s questions and doubts were legitimate. He was not with the other disciples when Jesus had first shown Himself to them alive. But on the ‘eighth day’ (symbolic of new creation, Resurrection, the fullness of God’s kingdom come), Jesus did reveal Himself to Thomas. Jesus first showed His wounds. Then He invited Thomas to touch His wounds. And what is important here is that John does not indicate whether Thomas actually touched Jesus’ wounds. The very next thing after Jesus’ invitation is Thomas’s confession. “My Lord and my God,” This is the strongest confession of the divinity of Jesus found anywhere in the New Testament.

What is ‘faith’ and ‘trust’? One could reflect on that at a human level in so many ways (especially in the ‘faith’ and ‘trust’ we may enjoy in truly loving relationships, as well as the pains and hurts we may have experienced through what we see as ‘trust betrayed’). But the incredibly good news in whatever situation we find ourselves (be it from the sins of others, or the sins we have done) is that Jesus is, and always remains, “My Lord and My God.” He never abandons us. Indeed, He is risen from the dead and changes everything – our view of life, our understanding of hope, and what it means to really experience love in life. He is your Lord and God. No wonder He said, “Peace be with you.”

How wonderful this risen Lord says “Peace be with you”. How wonderful He speaks of ‘forgiveness in life’. He is the trustworthy God. We trust not in our own selves, but in Him who died and rose again to save us. What a wonderful gift of hope and sure trust we have in Jesus. Amen!

And may the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.