

Thomas Reflects

(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, April 16th, 2023 - John 20:19-31)

We had all fled, we had all scattered all over the place. I heard that some of them gathered in a safe house in Galilee, but I couldn't be there. I just wasn't ready to spend time with them all yet. I needed time, time to understand what had happened, time to gather my thoughts, time to figure out what I would do next, time to grieve. And you know what, I just wasn't ready to face any of them. I just couldn't deal with the weeping of the women, could hardly contain my own grief, never lone deal with theirs. I wasn't ready to look Peter in the face, I was still pretty angry with him, didn't have the guts, I mean fortitude, to even acknowledge he knew Jesus never lone was one of his followers, how fickle he could be!

So, when they said they were gathering I just stayed away.

I had heard on the grapevine that the women were telling everyone they had seen Jesus, that he had been raised from the dead just like he said he would. I wondered about that, was it their grief? I know sometimes in the midst of deep grief, people have a sense of the deceased being with them – psychologists have a fancy name for that – 'continuing bonds', and to be honest I wondered if that was what they had experienced. Our minds can play all sorts of tricks on us, you know.

I am Thomas, Thomas the twin they call me. Others call me the doubter, the sceptic, the cynic. I knew I was hard to deal with but I was an honest believer, trying my best. When I told Jesus I would follow him even to death, I did mean it at the time, just never thought that would become a possibility. I guess you would say I am a more scientific thinker, we all think and learn differently, I just need good solid proof. It's not that I don't have emotions, I just need to see and touch and hear before I can truly believe and know things to be true. It's partly why I was always asking questions. You know it is no wonder I was always asking questions, sometimes it felt like Jesus was talking in riddles. Guess I was always trying to build a solid case for something, making sure there were no holes in the theory.

So, when the others found me and told me what had happened – Jesus appearing to the women, Jesus then appearing in the locked room, breathing on them, giving them a mission – I guess my scientific brain went into gear and I need proof of some kind. Let's be honest, to an outsider it all does sound a bit fanciful.

I found it hard to take it all in. Told them all I needed solid proof, now that shouldn't have surprised them, I always needed proof. I thought that if I could just see his face, see the scars, then maybe, just maybe I could believe all they were telling me.

About a week later I finally found the courage to join with them, they were still meeting in secret. So we gathered in this locked room. Jesus came and stood amongst us all – I couldn't quite believe what I was seeing. But Jesus knew me well, he knew that I needed proof to get to the point of committing my life to following in his way all over again. He did what he had done so often – spoke words of peace – Peace be with you. Then he

looked straight at me, and gently asked if I would like to touch his scars, have a closer look at his hands – he reached out his hand for me to take – but I couldn't – I didn't need to anymore. I did all that I could, fell to my knees and said – My Lord and My God. No more doubting for me, no need for any more questions, no skepticism now, not from me anyway.

But Jesus had more to say – gently he said don't doubt, just believe and I did. He then chastised me a little, well sort of, said it was great that now I could believe all that he had said about himself and all that the others had told me, but that maybe it was only in the seeing that I could believe. Many would come afterwards who would not see in the same way I was now, but who would believe he came, lived, died and rose again so they could have newness of life – their kind of believing would be a blessing to them and the world. That is the kind of belief he wanted.

I thought all about what Jesus did and said that day. Sure, he rebuked me a little bit, but he also offered me the proof I needed, he treated me gently, he met me in the midst of my doubt, he met me where I was.

I thought about all he had done and said in his short life, all the teaching I had listened to, all the acts of kindness to those on the margins I had witnessed, and it spurred me on.

I also thought about something that happened in that room the week before, when I wasn't there. Those gathered were given both a gift and a commission. When he breathed on them, when he gave them the Holy Spirit, he said something quite astonishing. He gave them authority to do something very special. It was about forgiveness – he said, if we forgive the sins of anyone, they were forgiven, if we retained them, they were retained.

Forgiveness, that's what Jesus was always doing. Not sure he meant for us to not forgive people, that would go against all he preached.

Forgiveness, perhaps I need to forgive myself. Perhaps I really need to forgive Peter, I was still pretty cross at him. Perhaps we all needed to forgive Judas, as I suspected he was just being used by others more powerful, and we all have something that causes us to come undone.

I went on and took the message of Jesus, especially the message of forgiveness, all the way to India and that's where I ended my days, martyred, guess I did follow Jesus all the way, even to death.