

Sunday April 11th

Easter 2

The story of 'doubting Thomas' is often seen as a negative one – the disciple who wouldn't believe without seeing the risen Jesus – and yet he is someone who just wanted to see the evidence for himself. It would have been easy for Thomas to go along with his friends who had already seen Jesus, but Thomas wanted to experience it for himself in order to believe. The meeting with Jesus provides him with the chance to test the truth for himself.

This week we explore how we come to believe



Gospel reading: John 20: 19 – 31

Jesus, sometimes we are like Thomas,
We want more evidence before we believe in you.
We are sorry when we don't believe your Word
or those who share your good news with us.

Amen.

God of truth:

For those who doubt: give them certainty.
For those in darkness: give them light.
For those who need to see: give them living proof.

Amen.

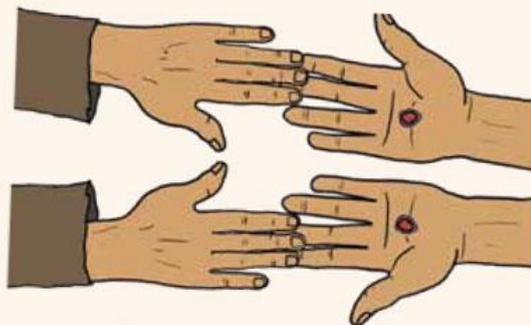
Read the story below about Thomas, stopping at asterisks to explain.

The return of Jesus from the dead was all the disciples could talk about. Every one of them was so excited about it. Well, not exactly every one of them. Thomas wasn't excited, because Thomas had missed it. 'Unless I see the marks the nails made in his hands, I won't believe he's alive,' Thomas said.

A week earlier, Jesus had appeared to ten of the disciples. They were gathered together, hiding because they were afraid they would be killed next. Although they were in a locked room, Jesus appeared and said, 'Peace be with you.' As the disciples rejoiced, Jesus said, 'As God the Father sent me, now I send you.' Then he breathed on them, saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. When you forgive people their sins, they are forgiven. When you find people guilty, they are guilty.' *

Thomas was with the others in the house now. 'I'll only believe if I put my finger in the marks and my hand in his side,' he said. The doors were closed, just as they had been before, but again, Jesus appeared. He said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he spoke to Thomas: 'Look at my

hands and put your finger in the holes. Put your hand in the wound on my side. Do not doubt, but believe.' Thomas was suddenly as excited as the rest of the disciples. 'My Lord and my God!' he cried.



Jesus asked Thomas, 'Have you only believed because you have seen me? God blesses all those who believe even though they haven't seen me.' This is why the story of Jesus was written down; so that people may believe that he is the Messiah, the Son of God. * All who believe in Jesus will have life through him.

John 20.19-31

Stop and share

- Ask the children what they understand by the word 'sin'. Talk about sin being the bad things that people do, that go against what God wants.
- Explain that in the Bible the word 'Messiah' means the 'anointed one' – someone chosen by God to save the Jewish people, and also a title used for Jesus.

Bible Notes John 20.19-31

If this account reveals the experience of the earliest disciples, it also reflects the struggles of the evangelist's audience: a community of believers in Jesus whose relationships with their local synagogue are proving painful (see John 16.1-4; cf 9.22; 12.42). Here truth is being contested. Some – maybe most – in the synagogue consider any claim that Jesus reveals God's truth as disqualified by his shameful crucifixion. A story that starts with the evidence of a woman is, to them, hardly robust enough to rescind their conclusions.

The truth told by Jesus' followers is tested by such hostility. How does it prove its integrity? Thomas' experience suggests that believers aren't so gullible as to accept it without question. He is often nicknamed 'doubting Thomas' as if he were in two minds. But the story suggests that he wants to test what he is told. What starts with Mary Magdalene's startling announcement (v.18) is amplified by the others in their report to the absentee Thomas (v.25). To his credit, he is not so naive as to go with the majority. He wants to know for himself that he really can trust what the rest now believe.

Thomas comes to that moment through a process of testing that holds together the experiences of his friends, his own honest uncertainties, the chance to discuss these with them, and his willingness to reconsider his initial conclusions in the light of fresh experience. Thomas is convinced; in the end he has no need to touch. But the story as a whole suggests that testing the truth of Jesus involves something more. In the fierce heat of hostility, it has to prove its power to reconcile and renew (vv.21-23). Here inner convictions are matched by relationships that ring true to the 'greater love' of Jesus (John 15.12-13), which is never more obviously displayed than in the wounds he continues to carry.

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Activities

Feely bags for VERY YOUNG CHILDREN

Play and recognise objects by touch

Fill a bag with five items the children may be able to recognise by touch, e.g. small toys, teddies, blocks, pens. Ask the children to find a particular object and see if they can recognise it, just by using touch, and then pull it out.

Believing banner

Create evidence of belief

Make a large banner with 'Believe' written in large letters in the centre. Help the children to paint their hands and make hand-prints around the letters.

What do you believe in?

Explore what 'believing' really means

You will need: access to the internet, pens, paper.

- Look online at causes, charities, food banks etc.
- Ask the children why they think children go on strike, and people volunteer or give money to charity. Discuss how often, if they believe in something, people will want to support that cause or charity.
- Choose a cause together to support and put a plan into action for the children to implement at home, as individuals or families.

Hand banner

Make a reminder of the proof Thomas needed

You will need: white card, pencils or crayons, scissors, a hole punch, glue, a long strip of paper.

- Ask the children to draw round their hand on a piece of card and help them to cut it out.
- punch a hole in the middle of the palm, then write the words 'Do not doubt, but believe' around the hole and decorate the hand cut-out (provide a copy of the words for those who need it).
- Work together to stick the hands onto a long strip of paper to create a banner and write the words 'We believe' onto it or make a poster.

Talk together and talk to God

Use these questions to discuss the Bible passage and then bring your thoughts together by praying to God.

Talk together

- What is it that makes you believe someone when they tell you something?
- What are the signs that Jesus did something special in this story?
- What can we learn from this passage to help share our Christian belief with others?
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Jesus, sometimes we are like Thomas,
We want more evidence before we believe in you.
We are sorry when we don't believe your Word
or those who share your good news with us.
Amen.

Talk to God: Put it to the panel

Ask others to help you believe

You will need: Family to form a panel.

- Explain that you are going to have a discussion with a 'panel' of Christians to talk about faith. Discuss questions they want to ask the panel, about God and being a Christian – including things they find hard to believe or what doubts they have.
- Read out the questions to your panel – allow space for anyone to ask follow-up questions if they want. Conclude by praying together about the questions you have discussed

Floating water

Test a theory

You will need: a glass of water (you can colour the water with food colouring if you like), a glass, a piece of card big enough to cover the mouth of the glass.

Ask the group if anyone believes that water can float in mid-air. Follow the instructions below to prove or disprove the theory:

1. Ensure there is something to perform your experiment over to catch any spills!



2. Fill the glass with water and add food colouring if you wish.
3. Cover the glass with your piece of card.
4. Turn the glass over, holding the card firmly over the mouth of the glass (a bit nerve-wracking this bit!)
5. Twist the glass back and forth a bit on the card.
6. Now remove the hand holding the card and hey presto - floating water!

Discuss any experiments you might have done at school, then ask: Why is it important to test things? What things are difficult to test?

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On the next page cut out 1 set of the 2 circles per child/person. Fasten them together at top, bottom and sides with a lollipop stick or any stick you have at home in the middle. Answer the quiz questions by holding up 'I doubt it' if you don't think it is right. Do nothing if you agree.

QUIZ QUESTIONS

1. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding. T
2. Noah didn't have any animals in the ark as he was too house-proud! F
3. Jesus raised the daughter of Jarius T
4. Easter is when Jesus was born. F
5. The Bible has 67 books in it. F (66)
6. Jesus loves everyone. T



Idoubt it

A picture for you to colour

