

Why Would Not Trust Your Friends!

Habakkuk 2¹⁻⁴; Psalm 31¹⁻⁶; Ephesians 2^{19-end}; John 20²⁴⁻²⁹

Thomas was with them. [John 20²⁶]

In this Parish, according to the will of the late Joseph Grice, written in 1821 and enacted after his death in 1835, was that the Rector preach a sermon on St Thomas's Day reminding the poor of *their duties and promising them celestial rewards if they are contented and hardworking here below*. As I wasn't paid the £1,188 stipulated in the Will for preaching that sermon in 2015, I won't be doing it now! How ironic to get such a sum to tell the poor how fortunate they will be!

St Thomas Day is also the Anniversary of me being ordained Deacon in the Church of England and the day on which I celebrated my First Eucharist as a Priest in the Church of England.

After Easter we had the same Gospel reading and I suggested then that Thomas wasn't suffering from doubt so much as FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). Having the reading so close has forced me to reflect more on what is happening in this post-resurrection encounter because, in the words of Carson in his commentary on John's Gospel, it is a pool in which a child can paddle and an elephant swim!

As I trundled through the 800 mile journey from the South of France last week the thought struck me, *Why didn't Thomas trust his friends?* They had, after all, spent three years together and must have known each other fairly well. They had shared successes and failures, acceptance and rejection and, above all, they had been apprentices to Jesus.

- ✘ **The other disciples told him** – they had seen Jesus; they had received the Holy Spirit; and they had been given the authority to forgive sins (or not). The fact that they had met Jesus after all the stress of the trial and crucifixion and, whatever doubts they must have had together, will have evaporated. They had moved from Disciples to Apostles, but this wasn't enough for Thomas: he still had the joy of a designated driver on a distillery visit! What a difficult week it must have been for Thomas.

As a general rule, avoid people who take the hope out of believing!

- ✘ **We have seen the Lord!** The sense of joy in that upper room – locked as it was – must have been so dominant and I still think that Thomas was more than a little put out that he missed the event! Yet, that joy didn't convince Thomas!

As a general rule, avoid people who sap the joy out of faith!

- ✘ **Do not doubt but believe.** Confronted with Jesus and the reality of the resurrection Thomas eventually joins the party to celebrate the resurrection.

As a general rule, resist people who try to rush faith! Faith is God's work in God's time.

Joseph Grice thought he was doing a good thing, the right thing with all the money his father had made as a famous Birmingham gun maker – whilst not seeing the irony of his bequest! Yet he was trying to dictate the future.

The disciples will have tried hard to convince Thomas and thought it a good thing, the right thing to do. Why wouldn't he trust them? Their faith wasn't Thomas's faith.

We don't come to faith because it suits those around us (people who will sooner or later reveal their fallibility) but because we respond in God's time to God's invitation.