

If one of our friends comes back from holiday and tells us they met a film star who took them out for sumptuous meals and entertained them over several days, but they forgot to get an autograph and there aren't any photographs, then we might smile and feel what we've been told is a bit of a tall tale? We would find it hard to believe, perhaps? Why is that? When I gave this as a presentation to our children on Sunday, at "Jigsaw", the response I got was, "Where's the evidence?" That is a good example of how our school system has changed over the years and children have become very much more science focused, fact checking information. But, it's exactly what Thomas did when Jesus' friends told him about the miraculous meeting with the Risen Lord, which he had not been present at.

Thomas says, "unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." There speaks a scientist! A week later, Thomas is there when Jesus appears again and this time he does believe. The story doesn't tell us whether Thomas actually did put his fingers and hands where he said he needed to in order to believe. It reminds me that we never know if Mary Magdalene, also in John's Gospel, ever grabs hold of the Risen Jesus? Jesus says, "don't hold onto me", but it doesn't say that she took hold of him? Maybe these were points where scientific belief was set aside and faith took over?

The other fascinating thing that happens in this story, and we can often miss it, is that Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the disciples. Normally we think of Luke's account in his gospel and in Volume 2, Acts of the Apostles. There the spirit is given at Pentecost. But, the birth of Jesus is slightly different in different gospels too. These are stories of mysterious and unfathomable events, beyond the realm of human experience. Maybe it's not surprising that they are shrouded in mystery and that there were different accounts circulating amongst the churches when the Gospels were written down? We can't nail the evidence down and we are left the statements of faith that we hear from Thomas and also from Mary Magdalene. Each of us, in our own way, has to discover the Risen Christ in our lives and in the world today in order to believe. Ours is a living faith and Christ builds relationships with us in different ways and at different times of our lives.

Importantly, Jesus does not reject and push Thomas away when he refuses to believe. Instead, Jesus draws Thomas closer by inviting him to place his fingers and hands in the wounds. Also, in John's Gospel, Chapter 1, Jesus' first disciples try to find out who Jesus really is. Jesus invites them to, "Come and see!" Just as with Thomas, Jesus draws those who are unsure closer to him so that they can discover for themselves and, so, believe.

St Paul doesn't believe in Christ and he never meets Christ in the same way that the apostles do. He experiences Christ on the road to Damascus, in a very real and life changing way. The result is that he builds an intimate relationship with Christ and his life is turned around. We have to build our own intimate relationship with Christ. Until we experience him in our lives it's very hard for us to believe. The church is the Body of Christ

so if we can experience him anywhere it should be in the Church? The Eucharist is a time when we can feel very close, which makes our current isolation especially painful to bear. But also, in prayer, perhaps especially on retreat, we can feel very intimate with Jesus?

Maybe when we look back we see Jesus in our lives in ways that we didn't notice at the time? I'm thinking of Margaret Fishback Powers piece, "Footprints". If you're not familiar with it, it's something you could look up on the web and read? Perhaps it's easiest to see the love of Christ in action as we see how others selflessly give themselves in service? The prayer of Theresa of Avila points us to that recognition of Jesus in all the people we have helped and made a difference to, and all the people who have done the same to us. When we think of all of the people supporting life and the sick during this terrible Pandemic that, I believe, is when we see and experience Christ.