

Thomas wondered why he was the one who was being whispered about? They all thought he couldn't hear, but he could. Perfectly.

But even if he hadn't heard he only needed to look at their faces which gave away as much as their whispers. The fake sympathy or understanding. "He's just jealous,". "We got to see Jesus and he wasn't here when Jesus appeared to us." The underlying meaning being that Jesus appeared deliberately at a time when Thomas was not present.

But how little they knew him. Thomas wasn't jealous. Thomas was hurt. Thomas was worried. He was worried he was losing something, something that was so profound to him, so essential about his world right now. He was scared the foundations had been taken away and it was all going to collapse.

Then Thomas laughed to himself, remembering, "Wasn't it Peter and John who had felt they needed to run to the tomb because they doubted the words of Mary? That was doubt needing proof, but they aren't being whispered about."

And wasn't it Thomas, who tied his colours to Jesus' mast when he chose to return to Bethany with him to be with Mary and Martha on hearing they had lost Lazarus?

Again he laughed with frustration because the others tried to persuade Jesus not to go. They hummed and hawed, scared more for their own lives than for Jesus, but he was the one who said, "Let us go and die with him", not the bold Peter known as the Rock, not the Zealot who said he was prepared to die for the cause, not the Sons of Thunder, but he who was now being whispered about as The Doubter.

Thomas was not the doubter. Thomas was the one who perhaps understood more than the others, which made this moment hard for him because the one who was willing to die with Jesus, wasn't there when Jesus returned. And that hurt Thomas.

The others didn't understand this questioning was a way of showing deep down grief, not doubt. This wasn't about belief or questioning faith. This was about trust. So, Thomas was quiet for the rest of the week and the other disciples left him alone. The whispers became fewer, but he knew what they were thinking. He wanted to see the holes where the nails had been, not to prove some fact but to trust again, to know this relationship with Jesus had been real and could go on.

And just at that moment of crisis, when he thought he was going to let go, it happened again. This time, for him. Jesus appeared once more.

And again Jesus presence drew everyone's breath. But Jesus ignored the others. The greeting was Thomas' greeting, the words were Thomas' words.

And Thomas knew, if he wanted, he could put his fingers in the holes from the nails, but he had no need to do so. That was no longer necessary. The relationship was still possible. He was right to have followed, to commit to Jesus right to the end. He felt the strength in his soul, the peace in his spirit and the truth in his heart.

Death does not cut you off. Resurrection is a relationship and his relationship with Jesus was restored.

Thomas is a disciple who often seems to get a very raw deal. He is automatically remembered as the one disciple who doubted when there is ample evidence that all the disciples doubted the evidence given by the women on that first Easter morning. We forget that it was Thomas alone who advised the disciples to travel with Jesus back to Bethany. They were fearful of returning to a place where people had been planning on stoning Jesus. It was Thomas who claimed. Let us all go with the Teacher, so that we may die with him. Yet we forget that part of his story, preferring to remember the words *unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and place my finger on those scars and my hand in his side I will not believe.*

But when Jesus does appear again, despite what he says about touching the wounds, Thomas refrains. He does not need to. Seeing Jesus among them, however that was, meant it was possible to hope again, and so it was not necessary to touch. He discovered his relationship with Jesus was still as strong this side of crucifixion.

This is a story that spoke into John's faith community and as it did for them, so too for us. As faithful folk find their way through this unfamiliar world, having been forever reshaped by pandemic, Thomas perhaps comes into his own because surely we find in him the truth: resurrection is a relationship restored. But more than that, resurrection is a relationship with the future.

Thomas is our story that tells us in these times; tombs, darkness, Covid-19 does not break that relationship, with each other, with God, or with tomorrow. That's the experience of Thomas, and why the Gospel of John's isolated church found this story so important to them: this is about a relationship restored and

a future that is possible. Even when you experience something anyone would imagine would break the future forever, resurrection promise invites us into that very future, faithfully, armed with hope, possibility and the renewal of life.

As this story encouraged followers in past times, it is a gift to the church now, however that church will be, to be encouraged. Everything is changing. The old familiar is gone. The new is possible. Thomas is encouraging us right now, with the truth he discovered: resurrection is a relationship, a relationship with the future.