

I feel sympathy for Thomas. Imagine what he must have felt like when the other disciples come and tell him, 'We have seen the Lord.' It's like children in the playground talking about an experience they have shared to the one person who missed it.

I suspect Thomas was too proud to say, 'Oh, really? Where?' Instead, he replies, 'I don't believe it. Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands... I will not believe.'

Thomas was the apostle who earlier in the Gospel is recorded as saying, 'Let us also go with Jesus, that we may die with him.' But here Thomas becomes the doubter, driven to a proud cynicism because he feels as if he's missed out.

Thankfully, Jesus is not deterred by either pride or doubt.

Jesus appears again, and this time Thomas is present. Jesus shows the marks of the nails to Thomas and Thomas responds with the fullest confession of faith found anywhere in the Gospels: 'my Lord and my God.'

Thomas the doubter has been restored as Thomas the apostle. Not simply because Jesus has provided the evidence Thomas asked for, but because Jesus did not give up on Thomas despite his doubts.

Jesus does not give up on those who doubt. He always reaches out in love and forgiveness.

However, there is a gentle sting in the tail when Jesus reproves Thomas, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

John Hull was a professor of theology who went blind when he was young. In his book 'In the Beginning there was Darkness' he looks at the Bible and at Jesus from the perspective of a blind person.

For John Hull, the hardest part of the Bible is the Gospel of John, because throughout John's Gospel the story of Jesus is presented in terms of a struggle between light and darkness. In John's Gospel light is identified with goodness and darkness (or blindness) with sin.

That is, until we get to chapter 20 of John's Gospel. Here, John Hull points out, the tables are turned.

Thomas is portrayed as the quintessential sighted person, someone who insists on seeing for himself before he will believe anything. Thomas is someone who relies absolutely on his ability to see. He is unable to take anything on trust.

John Hull points out that this is one of the greatest weaknesses of sighted people: they rely only on appearances, only on what they can see for themselves, and as a result they lose the capacity to trust.

Being blind requires an ability to take a huge part of life on trust. And in that context, John Hull says, Jesus' words to Thomas suggest a 'special blessing is reserved' for those who are blind.

‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’

The ability to cling on to Christian faith when there is good reason to give up on it witnesses to the truth of the resurrection.

The evidence for the resurrection is the discovery that, when we ourselves become most aware of our blindness and powerlessness in the face of what life throws at us, including the coronavirus, *then* we come closer to the presence of God than we have ever been before.

In the fragile, uncertain, doubtful yet enduring faith of those who ‘have not seen, and yet have come to believe,’ God can renew the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.