

St John the Evangelist, Cambridge
Sunday 27 April 2025 – Morning Service

Acts 5:27-32
Revelation 1:4-8
John 20:19-31

May the words of my mouth and the mediations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight,
Dear Lord. Amen.

We're going to have a look at Jesus this morning but not directly instead we're going to look through the eyes of his friends. So let's begin on that first Easter Day and join the apostles. Mary had already seen Jesus in the garden at sunrise but it wasn't until later, the afternoon perhaps, that the men see him and start to believe Mary's story. But someone wasn't there. Let's start with him.

John tells us in our Gospel reading this morning about Thomas. I've wondered before about why Thomas wasn't there on that first Easter Day when the friends of Jesus cowered behind that locked door 'for fear of the Jews'. Had he gone to buy food? To visit his mum or his grandma? Had he nipped home to change his clothes? We don't know, but we do know that he missed seeing Jesus when he appeared.

So come with me to that same place, behind that locked door, but a week later. Nothing much has changed – the usual gang is present but they're all subdued. No gusts of laughter, no chatting about plans. No coming, no going. It's all rather aimless and sad. There's Mary in that corner with the women. They're grumpy because Mary saw Jesus first, in the garden, and none of the men took any notice when she told them! They never listen to the women. Only Jesus did that. There's Peter over by the table. He's been very quiet this week and won't say why. Not his usual self at all. Jesus would have sorted him out. Thomas is just here, next to us, sitting on a stool. He's fed up too. He's fed up with all his mates telling him that they saw Jesus right here. 'You didn't believe Mary,' he snaps, 'so why should I believe you?' And then he carries on staring at the floor, looking into the silence which lingers in the room.

And then suddenly, quietly, Jesus is here. 'Peace be with you,' he says - the women relax, Peter smiles, and Thomas' gaze shifts. He does exactly as Jesus tells him, touching those terrible wounds and then looking up into Jesus' face. And they both smile. Such love and trust is exchanged in that smile.

'My Lord and my God' Thomas says.

The Greek word in John's gospel is Kyrios which means a superior, a master and then he uses Theos which usually refers to the one true God. Thomas is very clear that not only is this his friend, Jesus, but he also knows exactly who Jesus is – so much more than a man.

We're going to move to another room in Jerusalem now. This room is different – much grander – and it's pretty crowded. Servants are coming and going and there are some soldiers standing about and looking a bit bewildered. But we can recognise some of the people. Over there are Thomas, James, and John and, at the front this time, is Peter. And what a difference there is in him. Peter, the man who denied Jesus three times, is standing over there facing the high priest – the one in the fancy gear with the odd little hat. Peter's got his ordinary working clothes on so they look very strange together. The High priest's just announced that Peter, that all of the group, have been told not to teach about Jesus. Peter's reply is utterly confident and his voice although calm is full of certainty. It fills the air - drowning out the soldiers' clattering, drowning out the council's muttering, drowning out every thought. Everyone has to stop, has to listen as the words fill the air, fill our ears, fill our hearts.

'The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, who you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, so that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.'

Leader, 'archegos' in Greek echoes round the room. Not the leader you would expect with a bunch of fishermen from nowhere who are going nowhere. No. The leader Peter names is a ruler, a founder, an originator. He is the author of everything. As John's gospel names him – Logos – The Word.

And there's more. Greek again - 'Soter'. Meaning Saviour. Preserver. Deliverer. Giver of repentance. Forgiver of sins. Peter and his gang are witnesses to this. And that makes them powerful. Not in a way that the High Priest and the council could ever understand. To understand the power of Peter and the others we need to move to our last reading.

In the Book of Revelation John, who identifies himself as God's servant, 'who testified to the word of God' also knows who Jesus is. The faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth are some of the ways John names Jesus. And there's more. For not only does John have a clear idea about who Jesus is and what he does for us - Jesus 'loved us, freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom... serving God for ever'. John also knows how this story will end - with every eye seeing Jesus and all the tribes or nations of earth mourning and wailing on account of Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus, according to John, is, with his father, the Alpha and the Omega. The beginning and the end.

That is an idea that really is too big to take in so let's go back to where we started to those people cowering behind a locked door with no idea where to go and ask ourselves what on earth, or in heaven, does all this have to do with us?

I can't speak for you but I do know that I've spent a lot of time with Thomas in my life. Somehow, through no fault of my own, I think, I missed out on seeing Jesus. I knew about him, I knew the stories, but I didn't see him. Eventually though, I came to that moment when Jesus looked at me and I was able to exchange that amazing smile with him - just like

Thomas did. And then, like Thomas and all the others I've mentioned just now, I had to work out what to call Jesus.

Some of us will be at the stage where Jesus is our friend – that's how it started for Thomas remember – but some of us will be moving on from that. We don't have to say what we think whilst standing in a public place, like Peter, but we should think about it. So my question for you this morning is what name are you going to use? Lord? God? Leader? Saviour? Those are great titles and it's worth reflecting on how they make us see Jesus. Or dare we go further with John and look out across time to that end which is also a beginning and consider Alpha and Omega? Look out at the magnitude and magnificence of God?

Whatever we choose, it's good to remember that we all have to start somewhere just like Thomas did and that "My Lord and my God," is a good place to begin. But if we do take that first step along side Thomas then we shouldn't be surprised if, one day, we end up somewhere very unexpected just like John did.

Amen

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