

Dramatic Monologue for the feast of St Thomas (2nd July 2017)

What a week that was! Not one I'll forget in a hurry! Ever since that first Sunday morning 'group vision' after Jesus was executed, all the other ten of our battered little group could talk about was, 'He's alive!', 'He breathed on us!', 'He gave us the Holy Spirit!'. 'Well, bully for you', I replied on my return, or words to that effect. I put it all down to delayed shock.

After a truly dreadful Friday night huddled together in our private hell, I realised that everything was lost; our valiant little mission had ended in disaster and we were all alone in a world that now hated us to death. What was the point of hanging around for the inevitable lynch mob smashing down the door? I just needed to get out, to start over somewhere fresh and untainted by all those miserable memories of what might have been. Surely I wasn't the only one to take all of Jesus' solemn talk of rising again from the dead as just another of his silly riddles? There again, perhaps I was. I was so sure I could see what he was doing, injecting a comforting but empty dose of false hope that would help carry my cohorts through the grief until they got used to him not being around any more. If I was going to get through this, I had to tear myself away from that insidious and pathetic hysteria that I could see growing. I needed to absent myself from a grief-driven mass hallucination in which I wanted no share. So I headed for Bethany, to lose myself for a while in Martha's cooking and drown my sorrows in wine skins of her cheap and cheerful red.

As I gazed into the fire, Mary sitting companionably beside me, I convinced myself that I had to stay away from Jerusalem, even keep clear of my twin brother; he thought me mad to follow Jesus in the first place. I needed this refuge at least until I could start to get my head together again and work out my next move. And then Lazarus arrived home, that close friend of Jesus who we'd all been convinced had really died. And seeing him, it hit me. I had to get back to the city at once, to our makeshift HQ where I knew I'd find the others still waiting for some kind of good news story. I had to stop them spiralling into the depths of unbearable darkness that I too had keenly felt at the loss our dearest friend;

I had to help the others see sense, to realise that 'he's dead and now somehow we have to come together to survive it'; perhaps I had to be present with them too, just in case there was something in all this resurrection nonsense.

Suffice to say, you've just heard the rest. You know what they say, a week is a long time in discipleship, the self-styled hero of the hour brought rather unceremoniously to his knees in fearful awe and wonder. Maybe Jesus knew I'm not the sort of bloke to take non-sensical things lying down. I needed time and space alone with my doubts, to begin to carve out a chink in the armour of my rational, sceptical view on the world to glimpse a shaft of light on the highly improbable. Perhaps that second appearance of my Lord and my God in that dingy little room was just for me, some kind of healing process I never knew I needed.

Maybe most other people are able to stay put and wait patiently for the appearance of a promised revelation, wherever they find themselves. I have to confess that, having been on the receiving end of something so utterly mind-boggling, a wildly-beyond-rational encounter with Jesus, it did rather change me. For once I knew what stillness felt like, a haven of peace in the relentlessness of life's restless hubbub. So now I find myself a little further along the road to faith as I travel away from Jerusalem for a very different reason. I've come to understand that God is using me to help others towards a new kind of sight, a belief honed through questioning and maybe even a little doubt from time to time.

I must admit that it did take me a while to get over some profound resentment against everyone. After all, I was left out in the cold for seven days and had to endure that incredibly irritating 'all knowing' kind of look from the others, you know the kind of thing. But I did get over it and although we've ended up going our separate ways, that one glorious moment in an otherwise grim week keeps me going throughout my travels across India to preach, to teach and to heal.

Despite his denial of Jesus and a number of other rash outbursts along the way, St Peter fell on his feet in Rome. Scotland, Russia and Greece took St Andrew under their wing. But over two Millennia, St Thomas has quietly become the most accessible of the twelve Apostles with whom we can identify most fully. The history and culture of the Scottish Episcopal Church has made her a safe space in which Christians can establish and hone their faith through questioning, debate and doubt. The figure of Thomas is inspiring and encouraging to all Christians for whom the journey of faith often involves ploughed fields rather than of smooth highways. As the writer to the Hebrews says, 'Faith is the conviction of things not seen'. Simply don't be disheartened if that conviction takes time to settle. It most certainly did for Thomas.