

Year B Easter 2

Acts 4:32-35, 1 John 1:1-2:2, John 20: 19-31

As I may have told you my last paid employer was the former Mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, the founder of the online financial data provider. The man who started his news operation had a simple mantra: Show, don't tell – i.e. show readers how you know what you have told them.

Either way the effect was tell AND show. And that, it strikes me, is one of the main themes of today's Gospel reading. The focus is traditionally on so-called Doubting Thomas but I would suggest that Thomas' bad press is a misunderstanding of this passage.

Today's reading continues the Easter Day Gospel, when Mary Magdalene was the first to go to Jesus' tomb and found it empty. Now we know Jesus had told all his followers, of whom Mary was one, and not just the 12 disciples, that he was going to Jerusalem to die and that he would rise again on the third day.

But Mary clearly didn't connect the empty tomb with resurrection. Nevertheless, she goes to tell the other disciples what she had seen. The details differ in Luke's and John's gospels. Luke reports that the 11 disciples dismissed what she and the other women with her had seen as an 'idle tale'. Today's reading has just Mary telling Simon Peter and presumably John that Jesus had been removed from the tomb. They go to check for themselves because Mary's word was insufficient for them.

So Jesus showed himself to Mary because just telling her what was going to happen to him had not worked – so it was tell AND show for her. She told the disciples and in John's Gospel they don't appear to have made the connection either, as they certainly didn't jump for joy. We find them locked in the Upper Room for fear of the Jews, very different from their behaviour after Pentecost when they had been filled with the Spirit. Indeed, maybe they were also afraid of Jesus precisely because they knew they had failed him badly. His death had left them feeling both failures and fearful.

In Mark's account of Jesus' appearance to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he writes These returned to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

The point is – Jesus had to show the disciples what he had told them several times over for them to believe that everything he had said was true. It was tell AND show both on the road to Emmaus and in the locked room on Easter Day.

Thomas appears to have missed Jesus' first appearance to the disciples, and he basically reacted the same way. I'll believe it when I see it. So, Jesus does for Thomas what he did for the others. Having told him previously he then shows him. It's the fourth time in a week that Jesus had to go through that same sequence of showing because telling had not been enough.

Why wasn't Thomas in the locked room on that first evening? We don't know but there are at least two plausible possible reasons. The first is that he was so grief stricken that he felt he needed to mourn by himself. The second is that he wasn't as afraid as the others. After all it was Thomas who, when the disciples were worried about Jesus going to Judea to see Lazarus, said Let us also go that we may die with him. It was Thomas who understood earlier than the others that discipleship may well involve sacrifice.

And when he didn't understand he said so. When Jesus says he has prepared rooms in his Father's house for the disciples and that they know the way to the place where he is going, Thomas in effect says I don't know what you are talking about, leading to one of Jesus' compelling I AM statements. I am the way, the truth and the life.

Solid Thomas, reliable Thomas, loyal Thomas, straightforward Thomas.

Thomas's overriding need to see the wounds wasn't born so much out of doubt, more that he had so much riding on it that he needed to know that a resurrected Christ wasn't just wishful thinking on the part of his friends. In that sense, we are all Thomas. We too need assurance that our beliefs are not just wishful thinking, and we should not be ashamed of acknowledging that.

Doubts and faith go hand in hand just as light and darkness do. Faith is about trusting God when we don't understand. But faith is also fragile, because if we are honest with ourselves, we don't always trust God, do we?

Like Job and the Psalmist, Thomas in effect demands that God shows up – Thomas is desperate to believe but needs physical and visual reassurance – and the wonderful thing is God did precisely that. By allowing Thomas to touch

his still raw scars, Jesus was saying I am here, I am where you are – right in the midst of the reality of life.

And perhaps we too need the courage to demand God shows up for us too and remind us that God's scars as are as real as our own, that He is as present to us as he was to the disciples immediately after his resurrection.

Jesus's scars remind us that some hurts are for keeps – even after resurrection. Some traumas will never go away, they will always be part of us even after we have laid them at the foot of the Cross. That's the reality of life, they are part of our ongoing journey.

In some ways doubt is more natural than faith and in a funny way we should make friends with our doubts because they are part of our relationship with God. The thing about doubt is that's also where grace is, where Jesus says I must come to your house today and make you new.

What is Thomas' response on realising that he has met with the risen Christ? MY Lord and MY God. All doubt swept away; it is almost the finest outpouring of human faith in the entire Bible. Thomas is the first person in John's Gospel to acknowledge that Jesus is God and that he is also in relationship with God. That sudden realisation brings John's Gospel full circle, the culmination of everything John has been saying since those famous opening verses of Chapter 1: In the beginning was the Word, the Word was God and the Word became flesh.

Thomas is no different to the rest of us in wanting an encounter with the living God. Like his fellow apostles, he wanted his own experience of the resurrected Jesus and not on some second-hand retelling of the story. And look what happened when he did. History has it that Thomas travelled further than any of the other disciples, introducing Christianity into India.

So what does all this say to US TODAY? For starters, Jesus says that those who come to believe without having seen are blessed. That's US isn't it? WE are blessed. Nevertheless, tell and show can still play an important part in our lives. Personally, only when God showed me very directly a few years ago how much he loved me did my faith encompass both heart and head rather than just my head.

I was very struck listening to a talk on holiness by the idea that conversations are sacramental. When talking to people of no faith, how we tell them about what we believe and why is important. Our willingness to engage with anybody and everybody, whether even just making eye contact with beggars in the street or talking to the person at the checkout, can create all sorts of opportunities. As someone at St Mungo's said to me a few years ago, EVERYBODY is a SOMEBODY. We need to remember that every somebody is precious to God, even if to no-one else.

But our words are not always enough, our lives also matter. Rather like the Samaritan woman at the well, we should be eager to say Come and see what He has done for me.

In reality, we ALL have to see for ourselves. Otherwise, we are in danger of being fearful, feeling powerless, doubting, reverting to type – just like those early disciples. But Easter's great lesson is that, just like those disciples, we learn that God isn't finished with us, that he sends Jesus time after time to breathe new life into us, especially at those times we may have doubts. The promise of Easter is never-ending, here for us today and here for us tomorrow.

Mary Magdalene had to see for herself. All the disciples had to see for themselves including Thomas. And when you and I see for ourselves – when we meet with the risen Christ – we will be empowered to do what Christ has called us to do just as those first disciples were empowered.