Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1-22; John 20:19-end

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

I love Doubting Thomas! Think – he was one of the very first Christians, one of the very first followers of Jesus Christ: he loved Jesus as a teacher and a friend, and mourned with the others when he died so humiliatingly and publicly on the cross. Thomas was surely desperate for Jesus to return and for everything to go back to normal – whatever normal was. And yet, when some of his closest friends told him that Jesus was alive, he didn’t believe them. The first public Christian to be brave enough to admit to doubt. Good old Thomas, say I.

And let us not forget others who have followed in those footsteps: Richard Holloway, who was Bishop of Edinburgh form 1986 to 2000, but resigned and went on to write a book about losing his faith, (It’s called Leaving Alexandria if anyone is interested, and is well worth a read) and Jonathan Edwards, the triple jumper, whose faith meant so much to him that he refused to compete on Sundays, but who resigned as presenter of Songs of Praise because he no longer believed. Talking about faith is important but talking about doubt is too.

So back to Thomas… ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe’. As I think you’re gathering, this outburst from Thomas in this morning’s Gospel has something a teeny bit heroic about it: Thomas has the courage to voice something which from time to time we all feel. Which, quite possibly, his fellow disciples were feeling.

It’s a fact that sometimes we do question our faith. No one who thinks at all can be immune from the occasional niggling of reason and intellect which argues against any decision made by the heart to follow Jesus. Personally, I make a point of doing a check every once in a while; I ask myself a few ‘what if’ questions – just to be sure that I am actively engaged with my faith, not just going through the motions. And I have to say that, particularly when I walked through Lent and Holy Week in penitence, in preparation and anticipation of the Resurrection, then arrived at Easter last week, all alongside such a bunch of truly joyful and godly people, I do feel genuinely blessed by that faith.

But let’s face it, we are all out of our depth when it comes to resurrection. It is bigger than any depiction or description that humankind can come up with. And that sense of being out of one’s depth is conveyed in the gospel accounts themselves, where the risen Christ is not recognised, where people run away in fear, at least until he calls Mary’s name. And this is, on her part, a deeply personal recognition – the personal encounters with God that we experience are always the ones that make the difference.

Thomas’ declaration is heroic though, not just for speaking up when others didn’t dare; even though John doesn’t say so in his Gospel account of Jesus appearing to the disciples in the room where they had gathered, Luke tells us that they were all startled because they thought they were seeing a ghost; and the only way Jesus could convince them of the reality of the resurrection and his presence with them, was by eating a piece of fish to prove the physical reality of his resurrection, because, as Luke tells us, they were ‘disbelieving and wondering’.

So what do we do about doubt then? The short answer might be: nothing. Maybe, instead of worrying about how far we have moved from God, we could be remembering how close God is to us. God can use even our doubts to teach us how much he loves us. Jesus in the Gospels meets lots of people who have doubts and fears about God: there’s that story in Mark about the father whose son has convulsions, and Jesus says to him: All things can be done for the one who believes, to which the father replies: I believe! Help my unbelief!

What Jesus doesn’t do though, is try and persuade anyone one way or the other. He simply joins them on their journey like he did with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, and he accepts their questionings. When you think of the abandonment of Jesus by his disciples, that played such a crucial part in his journey to the cross, one of the most remarkable pieces of evidence for the resurrection is not our continuing belief in God, but God’s continued belief in us, that despite a great deal of evidence to the contrary, he puts the continuance of the Kingdom of God into our hands. Even though our faith may be weak, He continues to put faith in us.

And there is that line: As the Father has sent me, so I send you……. The purpose of this resurrection appearance is not so much to prove the resurrection as it is to send the disciples as Jesus had been sent. Easter is not just coming to a joyous morning service and a game of Bingo; it is being sent back out into the world to live as a witness to those events of the first Easter day.

When the risen Jesus appears to doubting Thomas, it is a demonstration of the parable Jesus once told about seeking out and loving and saving the lost; that he is prepared to leave ninety nine sheep on the hillside to go in search of the one that had strayed. And when he finds it he brings it home on his shoulders, rejoicing.

So perhaps this is indeed the thing that matters: not our faith in God but God’s faith in us; that, and the juxtaposition of doubt and faith which runs right through the middle of us like letters through seaside rock, but with which God is willing to engage and work.

For me, the story of Thomas’ doubt is a helpful one – we are allowed not only to have doubt, but also to express doubt. In the end, this is not actually a story about absence or doubt. It is the message that the good news that is Jesus Christ can break into locked rooms, with no limit of time or space.

And we must not fail to notice that Thomas, having protested that he would need to put his fingers into the holes in Jesus’ hands and side in order to believe the resurrection had taken place, actually doesn’t need to do that at all. He looks, and says: My Lord and my God.

**Alleluia, He is risen. Amen**