Easter 2 - Thomas
Acts 2:14a, 22-32; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-end

The Facebook post of a vicar friend of mine in London, a few years ago, read:
‘Tonight’s ‘heresy out of the blue’ from Lent group participant “we
don't believe that Jesus really died, do we?”
Me, trying not to fall off my chair “er, yes, I think we do.””

The truth is we find the incredible truth of the Easter story hard to believe.
And we are in good company – for we find the disciples are also finding it all
rather difficult to believe too.

That first Easter morning, as dawn breaks, so does the news that all is not
what it seems. And, characteristically for our counter-cultural Jesus, it
spreads from the mouths of women and Mary Magdalene in particular.

But, let’s face it, this is all a bit of a tall order. Sure, Peter and the Beloved
Disciple agree that the tomb is indeed empty, but resurrection, really? Their
minds and emotions must have been stretched to the limit. And whatever
they thought might be going on, I am sure that hiding away behind locked
doors seemed like a very good idea, indeed!

And then Jesus appears. He looks different, but they do still recognise him.
He talks, and for the first time wishes them ‘Peace be with you,’ the greeting
the disciples subsequently copy, and we still use today.

So, in one of the most important moments of all history, the disciples give
themselves to the new reality that is the risen Jesus.

But, there is someone missing - Thomas. And I like to think he’s not there,
because he’s the only one with the courage to get on with his life. And when
he gets back the disciples try to convince him, “We have seen the Lord.” And
I’ll bet they even said, “Thomas, you’re just not going to believe this!” And
for Thomas, who shares his life with this bunch of hard and rough working
men, whose sense of humour can be a bit cruel, it is too much.

And then the following week Thomas is there with them, and Jesus appears
again, and Thomas sees, and he believes.
But, whilst we may be inclined to look down our noses at ‘Doubting Thomas’, let us remember that Saint Thomas is asked to do what the other disciples never had to. I imagine Thomas saying, “Well it’s all right for you guys, you were there.”

“That sounds good,” I hear you say, “but how on earth do I do that – how on earth do I step out in faith each day, as the disciples did?”

Well, let me tell you the story of a woman in her 30s who had one of those overwhelming experiences of absolute spiritual clarity. She knew God was present, and she felt God calling her to do something new, and scary, and hard. And she felt God so clearly that day that, despite her doubts, she couldn’t deny it for the rest of her life.

The young woman followed her calling, and for the next 50 years she did amazing things. But inside she doubted and wrestled with faith. She lived constantly with what the Christian mystics call ‘The dark night of the soul’. And her doubt was such a continual thorn in her side that those with whom she shared her life gave her the nickname, “Doubting Theresa”. But you and I know her better as Mother Theresa – one of the most saint-like people of our era.

And do you how she lived so successfully in the space between faith and doubt? Well, she took each faithful day, one step at a time. St. Theresa did what she could, and let God do the rest...

So, in these strange and challenging times, I give you permission to doubt as much as you need to, but please do leave just enough room for the faith that God will show you the next step. For all we need to do is keep putting one ‘spiritual’ foot in front of the other - that is the life of doubt, and that’s the journey of faith.

All of which means that, as we tentatively start our Easter journey in doubt, but seasoned with faith, St. Thomas, and St. Theresa, challenge us to fully embrace our doubt, but choose faith. And if, in the midst of our darkness, we can still hold onto Jesus, then we will have life and light in all its abundance. Amen.