

Dear sisters and brothers, happy Easter to you! Jesus is risen! Alleluia! On this 'second Sunday of Easter' we encounter the story of Thomas and the other Ten disciples as they met the risen Jesus for the first time. As I studied this passage, I was fascinated with the person of Thomas and his unique experience, and I wanted to know more. As I delved into the passage, I came to know Thomas a little better, and I would love for you to get to know him too. In fact, I'm pleased to announce that Thomas is here today to share his experience with us! Please give a round of applause for Thomas...

[Thomas comes to the front. We sit in 'chat show' chairs]

Thomas:	Thank you for inviting me. I'm very happy to be sharing my story with you all.
Kat:	Thomas, many people will have heard of you under the nick-name 'Doubting Thomas'. Being a doubter is probably not a reason anyone would choose to be famous for. Has doubt always played a big role in your life?
T:	Not exactly. I'm definitely a thinking type of person. For me, information, evidence and reason are important. So, whenever those are missing, I do tend to get agitated and sometimes find it hard to just believe what someone says. As I'm sure you'll find out...
K:	Talk us through what happened during the days after Jesus' death all those years ago. I'm actually struck by the pace of events during that Passover weekend. Jesus had been condemned to death, crucified, died and buried on the Friday. And on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene came running over to you and the other disciples saying she had seen the Lord alive. Did anyone believe her?
T:	Actually, I'm not sure if it really sunk in for any of us. We were all so afraid of what the crowds might do to us. Mary was convinced, but it was such a confusing time.
K:	The next event happened that same evening. Jesus appeared to the disciples. But you weren't there. Where were you? I was wondering if you maybe weren't as afraid as the others and didn't feel the need to hide out in the locked room?
T:	No, I was just as afraid as the rest of them. To be honest, I wasn't thinking about the others. I knew some of them planned to stay together. But I was hiding in a different place. There had been so much happening, so much chaos, I needed to get away from it all. I needed some space. A place where I could just be quiet. And not have to listen to all the others sharing their fears and theories and crazy plans.
K:	So you were alone?

T:	Yes. And I was grateful to finally get some peace.
K:	But then the other Ten came and found you and told you they had seen Jesus too?!
T:	Yeah, that was crazy! But I couldn't take any more drama. I must admit that my response was a little abrupt. I just shouted something like, "Unless Jesus stands before me and I can put my fingers in his scars, I won't believe you!"
K:	So you didn't believe them?
T:	It wasn't a case of believing or not. Of course I wanted to believe. But this dilemma was in my head: on the one hand, if it was true, then I'd missed out on the biggest spiritual experience of my life; and if it wasn't true, then I really didn't want to be any more disappointed and look like a fool.
K:	So how did you feel?
T:	I think, in retrospect, I probably felt resentful. If Jesus had really appeared to the others, somehow knowing where they'd be and miraculously getting through the locked door, surely he would have also known that I wasn't there. That really hurt. I felt rejected. Had he done it on purpose? Was he really my friend? Maybe he didn't think I was apostle-material.
K:	It sounds like you were in a pretty bad state of mind...
T:	Yes, my thoughts definitely spiralled downwards.
K:	And how long did you feel like this?
T:	I felt pretty bad for a whole week. Nothing happened on the Monday. And after a couple more days, it kind of confirmed to me that I really had been purposefully left out. It got so bad that I couldn't cope on my own, and eventually I went to find the others.
K:	I can empathise with you a bit. Some years ago I was on a mission gap year, and it seemed like all my fellow team members were having amazing spiritual experiences, and I just didn't. And it got to the point where I had to pose the question: if God is real, then it's all true, or none of it is. And so, for the first time ever, I contemplated the possibility that there was no God. It was a very lonely feeling. And it remained with me for quite a long time.
T:	Yeah, doubting God and questioning everything you've based your life on is a very lonely place.
K:	It's maybe a similar feeling for people who are going through particularly challenging times in life.
T:	Yes, if you feel like no one understands and no one else is going through what you're going through, it can be so lonely. I've actually heard a lot of people say this. Like someone who has just suffered a loss, or someone

	who's battling an addiction, or someone who's dreams are never fulfilled...
K:	But after that long week, Jesus appeared again. What was that like?
T:	Amazing! Absolutely surprising! But then, I was worried about how Jesus would relate to me. Because I had refused to believe. I didn't know if he would even acknowledge me.
K:	It seemed almost as though Jesus came specifically to see you...
T:	Yes, he spoke to me. And it was such a relief. He was kind. Very personal. And very gentle.
K:	What did he say to you?
T:	Actually, he kind of offered me everything that I'd blurted out to the disciples the week before. He showed me the wounds in his hands and his side. And he held his wrists out for me to touch the holes left by the nails.
K:	And did you touch them?
T:	I didn't need to. Just seeing him there, hearing him speak my name, seeing the way he held out his wounds for me. I felt so... accepted.
K:	And then you blurted out something else...
T:	Yes, I said, "My Lord and my God". It was really a moment of absolute clarity. All those thoughts which had been dragging me down were suddenly gone. I just knew. I didn't need any more convincing.
K:	What made the difference? What helped you to overcome your doubts?
T:	I think it was the way he just came and stood by me, like the way he always used to. There was nothing grand, or judging, or distant about him. And then it was the way he showed his wounds.
K:	What was special about Jesus showing his wounds?
T:	He was so real. It was a vulnerable thing to do. And he didn't hide them. He wasn't embarrassed, or ashamed. Actually, it was really important for him that we <i>all</i> saw his wounds. Not just because it proved that he was the same man that was crucified that Friday, but because he showed us what God is like.
K:	How would you define that?
T:	A friend, who shows you his wounds, because he wants you to be honest about your hurts too.
K:	That kind of contradicts a lot of what we learn in life: that we need to cover up our scars and pretend like we're fine.
T:	God's good news does go against a lot of cultural norms.
K:	What would your advice be for Christians nowadays who are struggling

	with doubt or who feel alone in a difficult situation?
T:	Find a trusted friend, and be a little bit vulnerable. Maybe try sharing a little of whatever is troubling you. It could be a doubt, a thought or a feeling, or a wound. And I'm pretty sure that as you open up, you'll find people who have similar experiences, similar doubts, similar wounds.
K:	That has happened to me. There have been things in my life that I felt I needed to hide because I felt ashamed or afraid or alone, but when I found someone I felt I could trust and opened up about it, I discovered someone who had the same thing happen, someone who understood, someone who shared something of their own story.
T:	Yes, it's when we share our stories that suddenly we don't feel so alone.
K:	Thomas, thank you for sharing your story. It is been so encouraging. Let's show our appreciation to Thomas... (applause)

[Thomas leaves the stage. Kat moves to the lectern.]

Sisters and brothers, whatever wounds we are hiding – whatever you've done, whatever has been done to you, however circumstances have affected your life, however you feel – God comes to us like a friend, showing us *his* wounds...
Amen

We now have the opportunity to respond, taking inspiration from Thomas who saw Christ's wounds and declared Jesus to be his Lord and God.

In the time of silence that will follow, you may want to close your eyes. Or you may want to keep your eyes open and look at the symbols of Christ's wounds here at the front.

And then after a time of silence, we will declare that Jesus is our Lord and our God through the Affirmation of Faith and through the words of the song.

And later, we will have the opportunity to share something of our own wounds with God, as we move into a time of prayer.

So, let us now have a time of silence.