

UNLESS I SEE...

(John 20.24-31)

Over these past few weeks, 3 of which I have missed with being on holiday, we have been looking at John's account of Jesus appearing to his disciples and others prior to his final departure, his ascension from earth into heaven.

I was here for the first instalment, which Jenny carried out with great aplomb, and since I returned from France, I have been able to read Mark Nile's rendition from last week on Saint Mary's website also very good. I have only missed out on hearing Paul and I am hoping he will give us a round up of this whole section next week. As Paul would say, come next week for the final episode.

That leaves me to get through today, which for some reason I have found hard to compose, despite having plenty of time and reading many bits and pieces, so forgive me if its not all there, so to speak. I will blame it on the French air traffic controllers who delayed our flight, thank you very much! Mind you, it was an extra four days holiday at my sisters.

John writes his Gospel in a very different way to the other Gospel writers. There are many differences; John omits quite a number of important milestones in Jesus' life, he also adds five new miracles or 'signs' as John calls them. Plus, we have the seven big statements about Jesus.

John does not mention: the conception and birth of Jesus, his baptism, his temptations, the casting out of demons, the transfiguration, the last supper, Jesus' struggle in prayer in Gethsemane and he doesn't mention the ascension.

That's quite a lot NOT to mention, but he adds completely new signs: The water into wine at the wedding in Cana, the man by the pool at Bethesda, the healing of the nobleman's son, healing the man blind from birth and the raising of Lazarus. John also adds seven big statements about Jesus himself; "the I Am sayings." I am the living bread, I am the light of the world, I am the door, I am the good shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the way, the truth and the life and lastly I am the true vine.

John is showing us how Jesus thought of himself, we learn more in John about who Jesus was as a person.

So why am I saying all this in relation to our scriptures for today; "Unless I see?" Well, let me try and explain.

John is writing to mature Christians, encouraging them to not only believe, but to go on believing. His use of language is to keep on trusting, go on believing, keep being saved. Not just to trust or believe or be saved. But to go being saved, that's our salvation.

You see, poor old Thomas didn't just not believe or not just trust at that precise time. It was more likely that he just didn't get his head around the idea *that they had seen Jesus in the flesh*, his friends had said they saw Jesus but was it? Was it really Jesus? Or just a vision, an apparition or some magic? That was a popular idea at that time. Did he really walk through a solid wall and appear in front of them in person? And then what! He just disappeared! as they were talking. "Yeah, right ho..."

Thomas may have shown in that moment a lack of trust, but he had shown faith previously, John 11.16. Then Thomas said to the rest of the disciples "Let us also go that we may die with him". This in response to Jesus telling them Lazarus is dead and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.

When Jesus does appear to Thomas, Thomas said to him "My Lord and my God". He does go on believing, it's just that he had a moment of doubt, he couldn't trust his own ears, he needed to see. Are we not like that at times? Needing proof, having to go and look ourselves.

Jesus is so good with Thomas (and us); he doesn't reprimand him or shout at him or do anything to crush him. He merely confirms what we already know of the son of God. Verse 29; "Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'." Many people believe in things but never see them in person.

Capability Brown was a famous landscape gardener who designed many of our stately home gardens for the rich and famous but he couldn't possibly live long enough to see those gardens mature into the reality of his dreams and visions.

Leonardo Da Vinci invented many things that he never saw built, he foresaw the aeroplane, the automobile, the helicopter, the paddle boat, the parachute and many more things. He was hundreds of years ahead of his time, so he couldn't have seen

any of these in action. Yet he believed in them, that one day someone else would build these machines.

So how do we trust, believe, put our faith in someone who we have never seen, or at least I haven't. This is where are Gospel writers make it easy for us.

Their witness to what they saw is proof that Jesus walked on earth and did what he did. It's the very nature of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John being different in their styles, their recordings, that make them plausible. The proof is in the difference. The many witnesses that each gave an account of what they saw, all add up to the verdict that Jesus is still alive.

I didn't see the Titanic sink but I believe it did because of the stories of the survivors, I didn't see men walk on the moon, (only on T.V.) but I have heard the astronauts tell their story, on their return to earth.

I was a witness to a crash once. I was 15 years old and selling cockles and mussels in the pubs of Preston. I came around a corner and saw a crash! I don't remember now who was involved, it may have been a car and a motorbike but at the time I was asked to wait for the police and give my version of what I saw. I told the policeman that the other witnesses had said it was different to my version. I have always remembered that he told me not to worry and that it made more sense to the police if the stories were all slightly different as that meant it was true. Remember that when you next need an alibi.

So, I don't know about you but as for me I am quite happy to go on believing, go on trusting, that Jesus is now alive and living in me by his Holy Spirit. He may not be visible yet but he did send the Holy Spirit to continue his work in us, as long as we accept that, we don't need to see him! Do we?

Paul will be concluding this part of history next week and then it will be time for Jesus' ascension followed by the birth of his church. Pentecost.

The excitement is growing. Jesus appeared to his disciples and others not only to prove the grave couldn't hold him, not only to encourage them to go on believing but so much more.

Jesus was preparing his disciples for Pentecost, the birth of his church, the great empowering of so many lives; 3,000 in one day will turn to Christ and receive his Holy Spirit, wait until that happens.

For now, we can trust the scriptures and what they said about the only son of God, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He has risen, he has appeared to many and one day he will return. When he does, every eye will see the creator of our world, the maker of our universe, the one who loves us enough that he sent his son to die for us. Halleluiah, he is risen, he is risen indeed.

Let's be ready, let's pray.