

...and he breathed on them.

I would have to admit to being a bit of a hermit at times. No surprise for those close to me, but at the end of the day, what I like is being quiet and alone. The amateur psychologists out there would recognise this as being typically introverted, and possibly reaching for their deeply recessed understanding of Myers-Briggs could be happily working out the rest of the scale. Even more trendy ones are probably grabbing their enneagram diagrams and happily working that out as well.

For the record: INFP, with off the scale I, and apparently, 4 with 8 overtones. I have no idea what that last one means: I'm always suspicious of star-shaped objects! I say apparently, because I've never actually completed it, nor have I any intention of doing so! Saying you've read something in the stars is likely to find you lost in Jerusalem asking the wrong person for directions to find a baby!

But what I have noticed in the blurb that was sent to me telling me about me, it's all about creative challenging, and the quest for peace. Yes, peace. Back to my cell, and seeking quiet. And I know that I'm not alone in doing that. After a long day surrounded by people, requests, demands and teaching, Jesus would disappear off by himself for quiet prayer and rest before turning up and starting all over again.

One of his most famous episodes of quiet ended up on Lake Galilee in a storm. Whilst he slept, everyone around him were flat out bailing out the boat trying to remain afloat. Waking him up, Jesus shouted out: Peace: be still! And the wind and waves stopped. So did the disciples. Having achieved what they wanted, their peace was then replaced with a different fear: who is this that even the wind and waves obey him?

So, I get the feeling that our disciples are either blessed with short-term memories, or are rather thick! They've seen many signs and wonders; healings, demons banished, lame people walk; mute people speak; blind given back sight, and even people raised from the dead. The wind and waves also obey him, and even water can become Grange Hermitage without treading the grapes first! And faced with the news he has risen from the dead: they locked themselves in a room out of fear.

And then he appeared to them. The door was locked. He just appeared, and said, *Peace be with you*. And they rejoiced at the sight of Jesus. But not all of them were present. Thomas was missing. I suspect Thomas is actually an enneagram 8, with no overtones! He is a challenger and happy to speak his mind.

Over the centuries, Thomas receives the same sort of publicity that Mary Magdalene attracted. Dismissed for asking questions, or having a rather suspect past seems to skew the minds of the less adventurous types. Mary Magdalene is already considered strange given she was entrusted with the news of the resurrection. Now, here is Thomas placing down conditions on which he will believe.

It is so easy to concentrate on the negative and scandalous side of this story. And many have. Fallen woman! Prostitute! (and that one is NOT supported by scripture but was said by a Bishop of Rome, so it must be true!) And of course, there is the Doubting Thomas!

Let's tease this out a bit more.

Thomas is one of my heroes in the story of Jesus, Son of God and Saviour. He is the human voice who asks the questions that need to be asked, often eliciting from Jesus the response that we all need to know and hear.

In a passage that is a favourite at funerals, Thomas asks the obvious question that gives us all certainty in terms of what happens when we die. Talking about the kingdom, using strongly divine concepts such as pitching tents, Jesus tells us that there is room for us to be 'tabernacled' in heaven. "In my Father's place there are many tents, and I go and prepare a place for you. And where I go, you go, as you know the way to get there."

Thomas immediately pipes up and says, "We haven't got the foggiest idea of where that is! How can we know the way?"

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Jesus answers him with the most wonderful of directions: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me." Then, in response to a question from Philip, Jesus goes on to prove that he and the Father are one. If you see the Son, you see the Father. And he added a footnote. "27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

When he had heard of Lazarus death, Jesus set out for Judea, but the disciples were not keen on going there. They knew it wouldn't end happily, as almost certainly, Jesus would be killed. This is exactly what Jesus had been telling them was not only going to happen, but was totally necessary in order to achieve what he was sent to do. Only Thomas gets it. "Let's go with him to Judea, and die with him." (John 11.6)

So, it is no surprise that Thomas, known as Didymus, the twin, a builder, makes an extraordinary demand of the Resurrected Jesus. If it was truly the same Jesus who died on the cross, he would bear the marks of the crucifixion on his body. Unless he could touch the wounds, then the whole story lacked veracity. Thomas makes a claim that we need to know for ourselves. Is this the same Jesus who died on the cross for our salvation?

A week later, the disciples, back in their locked room, still fearful, are startled by Jesus appearing and saying to them: *peace be with you*. He looked immediately to Thomas and answered his request. Jesus showed him the scars and asked him to place his hand in his side. What happens next should really put aside any thoughts of Thomas being perpetually the doubter. Thomas makes the highest declaration of who Jesus is, bringing to a close the story of Jesus, Son of God and Saviour- well, almost!

"Do not doubt, Thomas. Believe!"

Thomas affirms what we hold to be our faith: *My Lord and my God!*

Having breathed on them, gifting them the Holy Spirit, he established that he was truly risen and alive. Having seen the scars, Thomas affirms this is indeed Jesus.

Jesus doesn't rebuke him per se, but does add a rider for our consideration: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." And this is the really good news for us. Thomas went on to witness and establish the faith in India. The Mar Thoma Church is as old and perhaps more stable than what was to happen in Europe. Even our own Anglican Church of Australia was part of the Diocese of Calcutta initially. We have that direct link back to the testimony of Thomas.

The gospel then says Jesus did so many other things in the presence of the disciples, and no book would hold the entire testimony, but there is one important consequence of Thomas' declaration of who Jesus is.

Jesus said, "7Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matthew 7).

Thomas asked and received. We seek, and will find. And behold, let us stand at the door of that upper room in order that the kingdom of heaven will be opened to us.

John's gospel concludes before the epilogue:

"But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

If the question wasn't raised, and the doubt aired, many of us would not believe either. All we have is the word of a builder who asked the obvious. How do we get to heaven? Through Jesus. He knew Jesus must die, but to achieve all that, he had to live again. Was this the same Jesus? He gave them peace and breathed on them. Yes. Who is this Jesus? My Lord and my God. And we're blessed to receive this good news and believe it!

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!