

Year after year I'm struck by the discrepancy we face in the words of the risen Christ. One week ago, but only ten verses apart in the Gospel, Mary, in the garden, after she supposed him to be the gardener, is called by name and then is told 'Do not touch me'- or as is usually quoted in art depicting the scene 'Nolo mi tangere'. And yet, a week later Thomas, in the Upper Room, is told the exact opposite, again so vividly displayed in art 'Touch me, put your fingers here, your hand in my side'. Why the discrepancy over a few days t?

Could it be because the wounds have healed, could it be because Thomas was a man and the Christ couldn't be touched by a female, could it be that the risen Christ just changed his mind. Who knows,

but the discrepancy strikes me every time I re-read this part of the gospel narrative- the same chapter, the same voices, but opposite commands.

Or maybe it has something to do, not with the characters involved, but with us. For the writer of John's gospel is no slipshod novelist. No, every word, every episode is carefully considered, crafted and placed within the narrative. Everything serves a purpose. And the purpose of these resurrection stories- of which we'll hear much more in the weeks to come, is twofold. First to witness to the fact that the Christ is not dead- but rather, very alive, very present, not disposed of by death, but rather, the one who breaks the chains which limit our human understanding of life to material presence. Secondly the stories of the resurrection are there to

embolden and commission the disciples to go out and love and live in the same way.

Something to do with us for we are, of course the successors to the apostles in all their dullness, fear, confusion, anger, loss. These stories are also for us.- that we may realise that this Christ is not dead, is not a figure frozen in history two thousand years ago and far away. Secondly it is also for us to be emboldened to life and love in this Jesus of Nazareth way- neither, like Mary Magdalene, wanting to hold on to familiar, nor like Thomas, needing the physical evidence in order to move on in faith.

We cannot know what the resurrection event entailed- we have the Gospel accounts, yes, but they vary, of course. More importantly we have the experience of lives transformed and new journeys undertaken, but we cannot know what the resurrection events entailed, except that it changes everything. No need to cling to the past, Mary Magdalene, no need to find the physical evidence, Thomas. Look rather to the transformative power of the resurrection in every age. In our own experience, with a radically different conviction of the need to include and value people- whatever their age, gender, sexuality, status or education. Or 200 years ago, when this church was built- look at the window- they were celebrating Shaftesbury and Wilberforce for their transformative work, based on

their faith, in overcoming the evils of child labour and slavery. Look at the changes wrought by the monastic communities of the mediaeval period in caring for the sick in the founding of the great hospitals of our city- St Bartholomew's, St Thomas', look at the Church of England's commitment to the transformative power of education in its thousands of parish schools over the centuries,- and we still educate 35% of the primary aged children of England.

It is this transformative power of the resurrection- the commissioning, the sending out, the openness to a different future, which is at the heart of resurrection power- and this is the very purpose of the exodus story too, which is why it is read today, a pre-figuring of resurrection, a prototype, you might

say, - and they still didn't get it- a prototype of Emmanuel, God with us, inviting God's children to move on, to journey in a new direction, to learn a new dependency upon God.

But have we really learnt it either? Just a week ago, it all seemed so powerful. But even as the Easter eggs are eaten, so we forget, or at least live in such familiarity, sometimes remembering and trusting, sometimes forgetting and doubting, sometimes wanting the old certainties of the way it was, sometimes wanting tangible proof. And all that without judgement by God, but rather in patient, forgiving, humour- we might call it grace- God goes on trusting us, revealing himself to us, inviting us to join in with his re-creative resurrection. So go, tell

what you hear and see of the divine love in action
inside and outside the church, the resurrection
body of Christ- yesterday, today and tomorrow.