

Can you think back to a time to your childhood when you learned something new. it might have been learning to ride a bike, to swim, to sail, whatever. Some of you maybe picked it up straight away; maybe some of you took a long time. It will have depended on a whole range of matters. Part of it would have been your own personal aptitude. Then there would be the person who was teaching you – were they patient or impatient? Then of course there would be the matter of your own personal motivation. Was this something that you really wanted to do? The important thing is that we get there eventually.

During the season of Lent this year, we found ourselves thinking through the whole issue of Covenant. Running through our thoughts we found ourselves thinking of faith, the life of faith in terms of a journey, a journey with God, a journey into God. We are all at different stages on that journey but it is a journey that we undertake with others.

This raises for me a very important point. Faith is not just about my relationship with God, it is not held in isolation. It is held in fellowship with others. We gather to worship, not as a collection of isolated individuals, but in fellowship with one another. Our Prayer Book is the Book of Common Prayer, prayer we undertake together. We say the creed together, we celebrate Communion together, in Baptism we welcome a child into the fellowship of the Church. At various points we will exchange the Peace as an outward sign of our fellowship with one another, of our solidarity with one another as we say to each other ‘The Peace of Christ, the Peace of the Lord’.

We are one, but we are all different. We have different temperaments, different preferences in terms of worship of hymns, of order of service. But not only that – we are at different stages on the journey of faith. Some are blessed with certainty, others know, or have known times of doubt or uncertainty. It might be circumstances of life or maybe that is just the way we are made, questioning, exploring – how do we relate to each other, how do we support each other along this life long journey of faith.

The older I get, the longer I have trod my own path of faith, the more I have come to value the passage we read as our Gospel reading this morning. It is two accounts of a meeting of the risen Jesus with his disciples in the Upper Room. On the first occasion Thomas is absent. We don't know why – he just wasn't there – maybe he had just slipped off on his own with his own thoughts, his own sense of loss, his own pain. When he returns the others share with him their own experience of the risen Jesus – but Thomas cannot share their enthusiasm. Their experience is not his experience – it has not happened for him. It doesn't make sense to him

Then a week passes by and this time they are all there and Thomas has his own experience of the risen Jesus. I often say that Easter came a week later for Thomas.. I want to stay with that intervening week. John tells us nothing of that week. All we know is that Thomas was still with them at the end of that week. He was still part of the group. He had not been eased out as a disruptive influence, one who might undermine their own faith. He was accepted as he was, with his doubts, his uncertainties, his pain. Uncertain though he was, he

still wanted to be there. Remember a few days earlier, in the Upper Room, John tells us of Jesus saying to his disciples:

<sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup> And you know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas comes back

<sup>5</sup> "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" *John 14:3-5*

Maybe Thomas was just that sort of person who just had to question, had to probe as he came to his own understanding.

This morning as we welcome a child into the fellowship of the Church in Baptism, we welcome not only the child but also his parents, their wider family and friends. While we share a common faith, we come with different experiences, different backgrounds, (different expressions of faith). Maybe we are strong in our faith. Or, maybe life has been hard of late and we are struggling. Our Gospel reading today reminds me that whatever stage we are at on the journey of faith we are called to travel together supporting one another, cherishing one another, honouring one another as members of the one Body of Christ.