

Views from the Pews: Doubters Welcome

Anglicans have long believed that there should be no barriers between Christ and his guests at the Eucharist. There is no theological checkpoint in church aisles as all manner of folk queue to receive Communion.

Many of those – perhaps most – will harbour doubts about certain tenets of our faith (that is probably why the Creed is said as a congregation together, rather than individually). Doubt is part of human thought.

Some other denominations require a personal declaration of faith, but not Anglicans. St John's Gospel at Chapter 20 relates the story of Thomas, who had missed out on the meeting related at Vv 19-23. Note that Jesus makes a special trip back to the house, having heard (by some means or other) that Thomas needed him. The doors were again shut – presumably again out of fear – but Jesus appears again.

His first act is to confer peace upon the assembly, and then he turns to Thomas and invites him to touch his hand and side. This is a crucial gesture because at 20:17 Jesus has asked Mary not to hold him as he was as yet not ascended. Jesus' ministry to Thomas amply illustrates the maxim that Jesus will come for all and any of us, despite – and perhaps because of – our doubts about the lack of rational, physical evidence on which to base our faith. Jesus exercised that ministry unconditionally. Indeed, it is Thomas who has made his future faith conditional on tangible evidence. Jesus returns for Thomas precisely because Thomas is a doubter.

Neither does Jesus require an answer to the question “Have you believed because you have seen me?” There are no conditions imposed on Thomas' future membership of the twelve, and we can safely assume he was present for all the events related by John in Chapter 21. This means that membership of a congregation must be largely free of conditions imposed by that congregation itself. It can be a congregation of doubters because St John has related Christ's

special mission to doubters. The Covid pandemic has increased doubt, while at the same time the community has become less tolerant of doubt. We need to tell all visitors that ‘Doubters are Welcome’.

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