



The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church

Sunday 2nd July 2023
The Feast of St. Thomas
Staying in Contact



The Very Revd Rod Reid - Incumbent (*usual rest day Monday*)

Email: bockingchurch@gmail.com Call: (01376) 324887 www.stmarys-bocking.com
or on Facebook, search for 'St Mary's Church, Bocking', or 'Panfield Church'

Forthcoming Services

Hymns

St Mary's, Bocking

Sunday 2nd July	8am/10am	Said Mass/Sung Mass
Wednesday 5th July	9.30am	Said Mass
Sunday 9th July	8am/10am	Said Mass/Sung Mass

122

468

502

Panfield Church

Sunday 2nd July	11am	Holy Communion
Tuesday 4th July	5pm	Evening Prayer/Office Hour
Sunday 9th July	11am	Morning Worship

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Gospel Acclamation

*The Lord is faithful in all his words,
he is loving in all his deeds.*

NOTICES

Stepping Stones - The final session of our course will be on **Tuesday July 4th at 6pm**. We will be looking at what it means to be 'church'. You are welcome to come to any sessions that you can make, and importantly the course is open to everyone.

Junior Church - Our Summer Term will finish on **Sunday 23rd July**, with a session on stained glass windows, please note the new date! We look forward to seeing as many as can make it for that. Drop off from 9.45am in the Church Hall. Dates for the Autumn Term will be announced soon.

Local wildlife walk - At **11.45am on Sunday July 23rd** there will be a wildlife walk around the village taking in Dorewards Farm, heading to the Windmill for their Open Day, and returning back to St Mary's. We are meeting by the Church Hall from 11.30am, Jacqui Hogger, one of our Eco Church leaders will be guiding us. This is open to anyone, either as an individual or with family and friends.

Benefice BBQ - You are invited to a BBQ on Sat July 29th from 3pm in the gardens at The Deanery, cost £5 for adults, children go free. More details nearer the time, but for now, please save the date.

Friends of St Mary's - The Friends have arranged a Barn Dance at Bocking Village Hall for **Friday July 14th at 7pm**, the dancing will start at 7.30pm! Tickets are £10 for adults, and £5 for children. Tickets are available today. Bar available on the night.

Mindfulness Trail - From Monday July 24th through to Sunday July 30th there will be a mindfulness trail in the church grounds at St Mary's. This will be an interactive experience open to the local community. You can come and give it a go at anytime on each of those days. Leaflets with more info will follow soon.

Fellowship Outing - On Thursday 28th September there is a trip to Cromer Pier arranged. There are a few places left. Cost is £45 which covers the coach trip and The End of the Pier Show. The coach will leave church at 9.30am. Please speak to Ann Lanham or Ann Harrington to book your place.

Friendly Friday Cafe - Following the success of Warm Space, our new regular community lunch space has re-launched in the Church Hall on Fridays from 12-3pm and will run until July 21st.

Prayers - We keep in our prayers Ron Cole, Peter Hopkins, Jean Goodwin, Sue, Roger, Frances, Peter, Jo, June Blackwood, Tony & Ann, and Margaret Everitt. We remember our care homes Millard House, Fern Lodge, Aspen Grange, Larchwood, The New Deanery & St Mary's Court. In our Years Mind, we pray for the families of Mary Connelly, Anne Plumb, James Cowlard, Freda Dee, Kathleen Brady, Sidney Phillips, Marjorie Kirby, and Fred Pryke.

The Collect for the Feast of St Thomas

Almighty and eternal God,
who, for the firmer foundation of our faith,
allowed your holy apostle Thomas
to doubt the resurrection of your Son
till word and sight convinced him:
grant to us, who have not seen, that we also may believe
and so confess Christ as our Lord and our God;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Epistle Reading - Ephesians 2:19-end

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

Gospel Reading - John 20:24-29

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.' A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe.'

Address

Just over a month ago Jacky and I spent a weekend in Dorset staying at the Othona Community at Burton Bradstock. Othona Bradwell is much nearer, but we were enticed by the theme of the weekend (The Engaged Spirituality of Jesus) and because the person leading it was John Bell of the Iona Community. In one of the sessions we were presented with four pictures of a man and asked to consider which of them we thought might most resemble St Matthew whom Jesus called from his seat at the tax booth. Working on the assumption that tax collectors in the time of Jesus were even less popular than they are now, many of us chose a picture of a man who looked as though he did not want to be too visible but would rather hide in the shadows. John Bell then pointed us to the Biblical account of the call of Matthew. Jesus saw him at the tax booth, said 'Follow me', which Matthew did, and then enjoyed a dinner with

other tax collectors. We do not know if Matthew was old or young, whether or not he hated his job, whether or not he did try to keep under the radar or was something of a party animal. It is only too easy to make assumptions based on a very limited amount of information.

Is this perhaps also true of St Thomas, whom we celebrate today? We know he was a twin, so perhaps more aware than others of the possibilities of mistaken identity. We know that he was not in the upper room with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them and that he said he wanted physical proof that Jesus was indeed alive. Apart from being named in the lists of Jesus's disciples which are found in the Gospels, there are three other references to Thomas in the New Testament. When Jesus says that he is going to the house of Lazarus and his sisters in Bethany because Lazarus has died, Thomas says: 'Let us also go that we may die with him' (John 11.16). Secondly, when Jesus says, 'You know the way to the place where I am going', Thomas not unreasonably says, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' (John 14.5). Finally he is listed with the other disciples, staying in an upper room in Jerusalem after the Ascension of Jesus (Acts 1.13).

We do not know for certain what Thomas did after this. Legend suggests that he travelled to India and spread the Gospel there. There are still Christians in Kerala in south-west India who call themselves 'St Thomas's Christians'. It seems highly probable that he was active in India in the middle years of the first century and was possibly martyred there in about the year 72. He may also have been active in part of the area that we now know as Iran. The story that he was the only witness to the Assumption (taking into Heaven) of the Blessed Virgin Mary may have less foundation in historical fact.

Despite all this, Thomas will no doubt continue to be referred to as 'doubting Thomas' and that phrase will continue to be applied to people who show a healthy scepticism when asked to believe things that seem impossible. But from the Biblical and other evidence, we could equally well talk about 'loyal Thomas', 'adventurous Thomas' or 'bold Thomas'. I doubt, however, that any of these adjectives will come into general use when referring to Thomas.

If Thomas has arguably been misrepresented in popular Christianity, may that not also sometimes be the case with regard to Jesus? And if so, is not that a much more serious misrepresentation? John Bell also spoke about this referring to the phrase, 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild'. Where, he asked, do we find that sort of description of Jesus in the Gospels? The simple answer is that we don't. Jesus is depicted in many ways – compassionate, caring, challenging, angry, but surely not 'mild' which tends to imply being ineffectual. Rather this sort of picture comes from hymn writers, often Victorian but sometimes earlier. Most of us will at some point have sung the verse from *Once in Royal David's City* that tells us that Jesus is 'our childhood's pattern'. Yet as a parody of that hymn puts it:

Can he be our youth and childhood's pattern
when we know not how he daily grew?
Was he always little, weak and helpless,
did he share our joys and problems too!
In our laughter, fun and daftness
does the Lord of love suspect our gladness!

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There is nothing wrong in using our God-given imagination to create a picture of the boyhood of Jesus, or indeed to add detail to the often quite sketchy accounts of the daily life of Jesus and his disciples. What is important is be clear about the difference between accounts derived solely from scripture and those that have been enhanced through our own creativity.

Having preached on at least a couple of occasions on the questioning (or even 'doubting') part of Thomas's character, I wanted today to try to offer a slightly different focus. The questioning is important. If Thomas had not insisted on proof that the person the disciples met in the locked house was indeed the risen Jesus, then we would probably not have the account in St John's Gospel of Jesus showing the mark of the nails and his pierced side to Thomas and the others. Nor is there anything wrong about having a questioning faith. But there is a point at which the questioning has to stop and we say with Thomas 'My Lord and my God!'

Two concluding thoughts arise from this reflection on St Thomas, both as portrayed in scripture and in the legends about his later life. The first is about being careful about making assumptions and jumping to conclusions. The Gospels were not primarily written as historical narratives about the life and times of Jesus. We might wish that they had been and that we did have more pen portraits of the leading characters and much more incidental information about the back stories of the followers of Jesus. So it is tempting to create these. That can be fine, provided we are clear about what we are doing. It is, however, important to distinguish between that which is directly derived from scripture and that which, while possibly based on scripture, has been embellished through, for example, the work of Victorian hymn writers or writers of story books about Jesus intended for children. I tend to think that Thomas had a concern for what in modern parlance we might term 'authenticity'. If so, then he probably fits quite well into a contemporary world view.

Secondly, I want to take seriously the stories of St Thomas taking the Gospel into the east of the then known world, possibly as far as India. If so, he can be counted with those like St Paul who believed that the Gospel contained universal truths, and was not to be confined to God's chosen people. At a time when we are rightly sensitive to cultural differences and wish to be respectful of other belief systems, this can be a challenge. But if we sincerely believe that what happened in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was good news for all humankind, then the church in our own land needs both to be confident in its world-wide mission and to rejoice in being part of the world-wide community of Christian people. It is good to celebrate St Thomas today.

Post Communion Prayer

Almighty God,
who on the day of Pentecost
sent your Holy Spirit to the apostles
with the wind from heaven and in tongues of flame,
filling them with joy and boldness to preach the gospel:
by the power of the same Spirit
strengthen us to witness to your truth
and to draw everyone to the fire of your love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.