

Sermon for 3rd July 2016 – St Thomas the Apostle and God's Plan

Good Morning, I wish all of you a very warm welcome to St Mary Magdalene. It's lovely to see you, especially if you are here for the first time or here to celebrate Michael's baptism.

In the Church we have liturgical colours to designate special times and seasons within the Church year. We mark the changing of the seasons by changing the colour of Fr Rob's robes and the colour of the Altar cloths.

For today's service we could have chosen between White and Red. White as a symbol of innocence, purity and joy because we come here together for Michael's Baptism.

Red as a symbol of Martyrdom and the great holiness of those saints who have died. This past week has been full of Saints Feast Days. On Friday of last week, we celebrated birth of John the Baptist, Wednesday was the feast day of St Peter and St Paul and today is the feast day of St Thomas the Apostle.

But Red also represents Pentecost, the day when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit down on us forever. Everyone who comes to the Church to be baptised is baptised in the Holy Spirit.

So we chose Red for our liturgical colour today as it represents both the Holy Spirit being blessed on Michael and the Saints that we remember this week.

So what do we know about these saints Peter, Paul and Thomas?

Well from the very earliest moments Peter recognises Christ as the Messiah, Son of God and believes in him no matter what. But Peter is also the one who continually gets it wrong, no matter how hard Jesus tries to teach him, he always seems to miss the point.

It is Peter that is so adamant he won't let Jesus down. He will always be there with him. Yet when Jesus was arrested Peter denied knowing him three times.

He does however have that remarkable quality of recognising his mistakes and openly seeking forgiveness and improvement.

Peter became the bedrock of the Church and after overseeing the Church in Jerusalem eventually ended up leading the church as Bishop of Rome establishing the church community there before he was martyred.

Paul was originally known as Saul.

He began as a persecutor of Jesus and his followers, being responsible for many Christian deaths in Jerusalem. In the Book of Acts it tells us about his conversion. Saul was traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus when Jesus appeared to him in a great light. Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him "Saul Why are you persecuting me? Saul replied "Who are you, Lord?" The voice answered "I am Jesus, the One whom you are persecuting. Get up now and go into the city." Saul got up from the ground and opened his eyes, but he was struck blind. After three days, his sight was restored by Ananias, a follower of Jesus. Following this act, Saul was converted to Christianity, baptised and adopts the name Paul (the Greek version of Saul).

He began to travel the world and during these travels, he preached that Jesus of Nazareth was The Messiah, The Son of God and started to establish churches. Whilst travelling Paul wrote many letters and those that survived became part of today's Bible. Paul's letters are important because they provide advice to leaders of churches and the congregations about how they can live together through their individual **and** combined acts.

Thomas was another of the Jesus' first apostles and Thomas was nothing if not honest. We are told from the early days he was willing to accompany Jesus to death even when the others disagreed. When Jesus announced His intention of returning to Judea to visit Lazarus. Thomas said to the other disciples "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16).

Thomas was desperate to understand but this caused his faith problems, it made him a little too open to doubting and questioning. His early discipleship seemed dominated by a struggle to believe anything he couldn't see even when it had been explained to him or he knows deep down it to be true. When Jesus told the disciples he was going to heaven Thomas responds: "Lord we don't know where you are going, how can we know the way?" (John 14:5)

Thomas' nickname as a doubter is secured when he refuses to believe the testimony of the other disciples regarding Jesus' resurrection. He said "Unless, I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." (John 20:24).

However, when Thomas saw Jesus resurrected his faith was secured and he became like Peter and Paul a protector of Christianity and goodness.

God has a plan for everyone whether we are like Peter recognising our mistakes and openly seeking forgiveness and improvement. Or like Paul, converted and just beginning our faith after a significant event in our lives or even like Thomas desperate to understand and yet sometimes little too open to doubting and questioning.

In our Youth Group session a few weeks ago we started by playing volleyball with balloons and hairdryers. The balloon was the volleyball and rather than hitting it over the net they had to blow it over using the hairdryer. They thought this won't be too hard you just have to give it blast of air and over it will go. Well I haven't laughed so much in ages; the more determined the youngsters were, the more the balloons were going all over the place. It was a good to see them being competitive and having fun at the same time.

You may be thinking What was the purpose of this game? How does it relate to God?

Well the aim was to see that we are not bouncing aimlessly through life – God loves us and has got a clear direction for our lives. Sometime we can feel that our lives are a bit like the balloons. They don't have a particular purpose or direction; they just get blow along by chance or circumstance. Even our best plans and ideas are easily messed up and things don't work out. So what is the point of being here? Is there one?

The Bible teaches us that there is a point. It paints a picture of a God who is not just real, not just all powerful and all-knowing but one who is **all loving**. He isn't a distant God who made the world but doesn't have an interest in what it's doing now. He is a God who continues to be involved, making us, knowing us and loving us. The Bible also teaches us that the God who know us this well, has a plan for our lives and he wants us to live so that we can make the very most of it.

Even with their different personalities God had a plan for Peter, Paul and Thomas. That plan was for them to be the Senior Apostles. Establishing his church through which his love was to be communicated to the world. 2000 years on and **we are that church today!**

We are not here by accident. Neither are we a simply a product of what happens to us. We all have one life to live and it's the choices we make that shape our lives. Let us take the step to find out more about God and how he wants us to live, so that we may begin to have an insight into what his plans for us may be.

Amen