

"A Week of Doubt"

The heavy bars thudded back with the force of Thomas's irritation. "It's like a tomb in here. It's the last place I'd want to be if I'd come back to life from the dead," he muttered scathingly as he squeezed through the part opened doorway. The solid door slammed behind him. He heard the bolts slide back as he almost ran down the enclosed stone stairway and into light that momentarily hurt his eyes.

In the courtyard he paused behind the outer gates, and took a long deep breath. The air was fresher out here, for all it was well on in the day. The upper room had become fetid with a week long enclosure of unwashed bodies, oil lamp fumes and stale cooked fish. He knew how security conscious they all were - even now he was cautiously peering around the gate before venturing into the street - but he wondered if they had completely forgotten the clear sweet air of Galilee.

Thomas had been fortunate in a way. He had found his own safe lodging with a cousin on the north side of the city; the other side of the Sheep Pools, beyond the temple and the Roman fortress. Fortunate, and yet not really. That was the cause of his dilemma. He had not been with the others on that last Sunday night.

Thomas moved off at a brisk pace. He walked eastward into the narrower streets, to avoid having to pass the house and courtyard of Caiaphas, the high priest. He could be more easily recognised there. The streets were still crowded. Many of the Passover pilgrims were still in the city. He wove a path through them. It was like the weaving of his thoughts. He felt sure he knew where he was going, yet his mind was running in many different directions and the same time.

"They can't all be wrong." He had gone over the ground so many times in the past few days. "If only I had been there. Why can't I believe them? Why can't I believe Jesus? He did say he would rise again. But.. but.. It's not possible. It can't be done. We've never seen anything like it before. We were never taught to believe this - only in a general resurrection for everybody at the last day."

Thomas had been over all this so many times during the past week. Somehow the answers the others gave to his questions did not fully satisfy his methodical mind. "What was he like ? Was he the same - the same body ? Did he speak the same - with the same Galilean accent ? How did he get in here if he has a physical body ?" On an on; round and round the questions repeated themselves again and again, and somehow Thomas' mind just could not get it straight. At the end of each visit the others would simply say, "Well, we've seen him."

It was at the end of this last visit that the other friends had become exasperated by him. The atmosphere grew tense and finally James said what was in all their minds. "Thomas, you still don't believe. It's not that you can't, you won't believe." "I've got to see," Thomas raised his voice. "But we have seen, and Cleopas and Nicodemus and Mary at the tomb," James argued "Can't you believe that ?" "But you still can't say exactly what he was like. Where is he now ?" James was really getting heated now. John tried to calm the moment. In his quiet, boyish voice, he said gently, "It was him. That's all I know." Something in the way he spoke finished Thomas. He was on his feet now and gesticulating fiercely. "Well, I want more than that. I want to see, AND TOUCH. You're right James. I won't believe. Not until I can feel his hands. Yes, touch the nail marks...and see the spear wound in his side."

There was gasp from Mary who had sat silently throughout it all. Thomas realised he could have gone too far, and it was then that he strode across to the door and let himself out.

He had reached the Sheep Pools. He turned into the street where his cousin had a small bakery. Checking behind him, as they all did now to see if there were any soldiers or priests to notice him, he caught sight of Thaddaeus. Thaddaeus waved. Thomas stopped. "Can we talk ?" Thaddaeus had been hurrying and was out of breath. Thomas took his arm and led him down the street and into the alley leading to the back door of the baker's.

Inside the room the two men sat at either side of the open window. The room was too close to other buildings to be overlooked and here there was freedom and cooler air. "I wanted to speak with you," Thaddaeus began. He was a gentle, sensitive man. "Thomas, I want to tell you I think I understand. The Master understood you, you know. He was always patient and tried to explain things to you."

"That's true," Thomas nodded. "If only I could see him. If only I could talk with him." "That's why I came." Thomas looked up at him, puzzled. "I'm not going to discuss it with you anymore," Thaddaeus continued. "I felt I knew what the Master would have said to you." "You always did catch on to his way of thinking quicker than me," Thomas conceded. These two had been friends long enough to be honest with each other. Thaddaeus went on. He looked out of the window as he spoke. "I just wanted to say this. It came to me how when we came to the city for Lazarus, you tried to warn Jesus about the dangers. He told us then he expected to die and then be brought back to life. When he wouldn't listen, you said you would still go with him even if you had to die with him. You trusted him even though you didn't understand." He turned his gentle gaze on Thomas. "I think that's what he want you to do now."

They talked on and Thomas finally agreed to go back with Thaddaeus and make peace with the others. It was only a mumbled apology, but everyone was relieved. There was enough trouble without having division among themselves. They needed each other more than ever. Only a week ago Jesus had given them the Holy Spirit, just for this - that they should have the grace of forgiveness.

That consciousness produced a glow of love between these friends, and it was in that atmosphere that it happened. Thomas could not reason it anymore than the others had been able to explain it to him. Jesus was there ! How ? The doors were barred. Surely it was his body. His voice. This was the familiar greeting, "Peace be with you."

He stood right in front of Thomas. It was as though he had come just for him. "Thomas," he said. "If it helps you. See my hands. Thomas could see. The others craned to look. Mary rose to look between their shoulders. The marks were clear. "Touch them. And the wound in my side."

Thomas did not move. There was no need to touch. He was paralysed by sheer joy - at seeing the master - at knowing he was alive. It did not occur to him to ask Jesus the questions about where he had been, what his body was like, what it was to die...Questions were no longer relevant. Only one thought was in his mind - the thought that he had struggled with through the past week. If this man had died and had been brought back to life again: If this man had overcome death: then he really was more than man; he really was God. Thomas collapsed on to his knees and in an awed voice, barely a whisper, said, 'My Lord ! My God !'

Jesus spoke to him. 'Do you believe now that you see me ? There will be so many who will believe without seeing me. And they too will have your happiness - my joy in them.'

Jesus stayed a while talking with his friends. Thomas was lost in his own thoughts. In his mind he could see a whole world full of people believing in Jesus. It was so simple. First believe, and then the facts would fall into place. All that struggling and discord was for nothing. he had known that and yet he had not found the courage to do it. All Jesus asked was his loyalty and his trust - and then he could become real and alive for him as God and Lord.

Thomas caught Thaddaeus' eye in the lamplight. Thaddaeus winked.