As we step away from Easter and into the resurrection life we are called to reflect on our relationship with Jesus. Many can comprehend that there is a creative force behind the universe, that this did not just happen by chance, many will also be comfortable with a spirit or force that unites us, that directs and enlightens us, most people will acknowledge that in history there was a man called Jesus, who was a radical Rabbi, who was crucified at around 33 AD, however the struggle of faith comes through Easter, the dividing question is not did he die on the cross, as this is widely documented but did he rise to new life 3 days after how do we respond to this?

Most theologians agree that John chapter 20 was the last chapter of John’s Gospel and chapter 21, with its wonderful BBQ on the beach and the re-instating of Peter was a later and yet still helpful addition to the 4th Gospel.

Understanding this, we see that John’s Gospel ends as it began, with a declaration about this Jesus.

John starts with the great Purple passage read at Christmas, In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word WAS God, the Logos (Greek for word) was seen as the pre-existent Christ, who was God from the beginning, the word, the thought and desire behind creation.

And the Gospel in its original form ends with Thomas’s declaration My Lord and My God.

My Lord and my God – interestingly Thomas is the first person in the 4th Gospel to call Christ God.

Thomas has had a hard press over the years and his reputation as a doubter has firmly embedded itself in common culture, the phrase “doubting Thomas” is well known and well used but is really. I think, a great misunderstanding and injustice.

Thomas is not so much a doubter but a man of faith on his journey into understanding God. I can relate to Thomas, as I often find myself in the same place, he was on the first Easter week, full of hope and a desire to follow God, but equally questioning and needing reassurance. Like Thomas I with each new revelation of God I find myself once more working out who this Jesus is and what does his death and resurrection mean

Thomas is seen in 2 lights in John, initially, he is seen as a man of great courage and faith, but also as someone who needs to be reassured in order to take the next steps.

For John, the incident that really galvanised the authorities against Jesus and that paved the way to the cross was the raising of Lazarus. When Jesus heard that Lazarus had died, he set his face towards Jerusalem, to travel to Bethany, which is about 3 miles from the capital.

The disciples urged him not to go, reminding him, that for Jesus, and for them, this would be a dangerous journey as last time he was they had tried to stone him. All of them wanting Jesus not to go, not to lead them into danger, all but, Thomas, who said “let us also go that we may die with him”.

No doubting here, you can imagine the scene the disciples and Jesus round the fire, all the disciples looking at their feet as Jesus spoke, full of fear and dread and then Thomas stands up, throws his blanket to the side and makes his declaration of faith.

The next time we meet with Thomas is in the reading today.

Today we see a more vulnerable Thomas, someone who has almost been broken by the activities of the past week, someone battling with confusion and uncertainty. Jesus has died, the disciples are now hidden away for fear of the authorities, previously the path was clearly understood. Jesus led and they followed, but what next?

It’s hard to imagine Thomas’s feelings when he returns to the room and hears the others excited conversation about seeing the risen Lord. Thomas must have felt left out, rejected, maybe even angry, and these feelings took over Thomas, the bravery crumbled, his faith shattered and a broken.

Thomas was at a turning point in his walk with Christ, all that he knew had been stripped away, he could walk away or cry out that he needed to be reassured, to see the wounds of the cross and to see the risen Lord. He was a man on a turning point on his journey, was he about to take the next step in his enlightenment, or walk away?

Thomas like many of us is on a journey of discovery, a journey into understanding what it means to be a Christian and to follow Jesus. Wanting to believe, longing for a new relationship with Jesus.

A week later Jesus met with Thomas, Jesus first words to Thomas were Peace be with you, Thomas, stop worrying, be at peace, I am here, I love you, come here, touch the wounds.

This was no polite prayer meeting, this was a bloody epiphany, Thomas a broken man, placing his hands into the torn flesh of the son of God, witnessing the lengths to which God had to go to express his love for us, for Thomas, for you and me.

In that moment for Thomas the world changed, no longer was he a follower of Jesus the radical Rabbi, but he was in the presence of Jesus the word incarnate, the Lord of all creation in the presence of GOD.

Thomas’ faith had been restored, his eyes had been opened and he was now ready for the next stage of his journey, moving from being the student to becoming the teacher, who is reported to have travelled to India and China proclaiming the Good News of Jesus.

Like Thomas, for many of us the journey of faith, is not straight forward, so often that Journey is one of leaps forward, steps back, blind alleys, confusion, stops and starts, like Thomas we make progress, and then something happens that challenges our faith, and we need further proof, further revelation and then on we go.

In chapter 11 we see Thomas the brave, bravely FOLLOWING Jesus, no doubt here, no fear, “let’s go to Jerusalem and die with him”, but Jesus was with the Disciples, they were following in his footsteps. In chapter 20 we see a different Thomas, one who is exploring what his faith means to him now, in the light of the Cross, in the light of the resurrection, who is this Jesus who is this man he has followed and was prepared to die for? In the two readings we witness someone moving on in their personal pilgrimage, someone moving on in their understanding of God.

For me the story of Thomas shines a light on my own journey of faith, at times ready to follow Jesus to the ends of the world and at others feeling lost and unsure, maybe you too have found yourself on a similar journey, maybe like me you can relate to the story of Thomas. The path of faith is rarely straight forward, the important thing is that we remain on the path, that we continue to journey even when the path seems hard and difficult to follow as enlightenment may just be round the next corner.