

John 20:24-31
It could be you!

Overhead: title

I'm not sure whether this seriously dates me, but when I hear or read that little phrase, I'm taken back to when the

Overhead: National Lottery

was first introduced, goodness, way back now in 1994. And there was that video snippet of a big hand reaching down from the sky, and a big deep voice calling out that encouraging phrase ...

Overhead: title

Well, you certainly need a bit of encouragement, because the odds of it being you are actually

Overhead: odds

45,057,474 to 1 (Lotto)
139,838,160 to 1 (EuroMillions)
15,339,390 to 1 (Set For Life)
8,060,597 to 1 (Thunderball)

So yes, technically, we have to insist, it *could* be you ... but it's not actually very likely to be. And yet there are anecdotal reports that a surprising number of people around the country are not saving adequately for their retirement, because they are not just hoping, but actually reckoning, that it could indeed be *them*.

It's all about

Overhead: hope,

really, isn't it? We use that word with some widely-separated meanings in English. If we think something is very unlikely, we might say

Overhead: "some hope"

Or you go to the very other end of the spectrum, where sometimes you might hear the phrase ...

Overhead: "the Christian hope"

And we've heard that hinted at in that second song we sang, one that Kitty specially asked for because it's one she's been singing to Jowan already:

*Keep me burning / singing / praying **till the break of day***

So what's that all about, you might wonder. What is the Christian version of the

Overnight: nightlight

to be kept burning through the night ... and more significantly, what's the “break of day” supposed to mean? This “Christian hope” is where hope and faith start to merge together into a sufficient certainty that you will stake your *life* on, not just the £2 stake for the lottery.

so that ... we who have fled [to God] for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, ...

(Hebrews 6:18-19)

And this hope that becomes almost identical to faith is one of the key themes in that Bible book that we read from a moment ago, John's Gospel. The words “faith” and “believe” or “belief” keep popping up all over the place.

And so it's really curious, you would think, that the person who pops up to exemplify faith at the big climax of the book is the person who has entered into the English language as

Overhead: “Doubting Thomas”

In some ways, I think that Thomas was what you would call the “straight man”, like

Overhead: Morecambe and Wise

Ernie Wise, who never warmed to the various shenanigans of Eric Morecambe. Thomas is the sceptic, who always remains to be convinced ... and who doesn't mind voicing *his* uncertainties. Which is a relief to the rest of us, too, who might not yet be convinced either.

So when Jesus is telling his disciples about his imminent “departure” from this world, Thomas pipes up:

“In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.”

(John 14:2-4)

And it's good old honestly-doubting Thomas who asks the question that everyone else – and probably Jesus too, the way he has set this up – is wanting asked:

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

(John 14:5)

And that sets Jesus up to come out with this important statement of self-disclosure:

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

(John 14:6)

So this Thomas is the guy who – conveniently, for the telling of the story, as it turns out – missed out when Jesus appears to his disciples *alive* again, on that first Easter Sunday. We don't know why. We're just told ...

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

(John 20:24)

And here are his most famous doubts:

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

(John 20:25)

And, to be honest, don't we all really appreciate the guy for having the nerve to speak up? – even if it does come over just a bit petulant, maybe. I mean, *you* haven't seen this in person, have you? Don't you feel rather like Thomas, just being told this and expected to believe it?

But Thomas' almost determination *not* to believe is to be tested.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them.

(John 20:26)

Look, it's a re-run of the previous event!

Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

(John 20:26)

I somehow imagine Thomas didn't want to be too obvious at that point. But Jesus will not let him just hide at the back. And I guess Thomas sort of gulped at the point when

Then he said to Thomas, ...

(John 20:27)

What's this going to be? A reprimand for lack of faith, perhaps?

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

(John 20:27)

I have always wondered whether that was meant as a command or an offer. We're not told that Thomas *did* "put his finger here" ... or that he didn't. Personally, my suspicion is that he didn't. Because he no longer needed to. He didn't need to touch. He had seen enough. And he simply drops to his knees (though we're not told that), in worship:

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

(John 20:28)

In some ways, that is the high point of the book. I mean, it's amazing that Jesus has actually permitted himself to die – if you read through the whole of this book, you'll see he made that startling claim that ...

“... I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”

(John 10:17-18)

And you'd have to think that that was a crazy, insane statement to make ... if it wasn't followed up by something as outlandish as an actual, literal, physical resurrection.

But it is as if we have now been presented with that claim, and presented with the evidence that substantiates it. Jesus has come back from the dead, just as he said. So that would surely imply, wouldn't it, that whatever purpose he claimed his death would achieve *might indeed* have been achieved.

The question is now what we are going to do with this. Are we going to believe it ourselves, or not? And here in the book for us is a representative doubter: Thomas. Thomas, who has now seen *and believed*.

So what John reports Jesus saying now is pitched not just for Thomas' ears, but the eyes of his readers:

Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

(John 20:29)

And now something really odd happens. It is like, I think, when you visit the cinema. And you have become really taken up with the story shown before you. Maybe you have got to what seems to be the conclusion of the film.

Overhead: Lord of the Rings

Only as you sit there, the picture freezes, and then

Overhead: fades to grey

And then the

Overhead: producer of the film

himself comes out from behind some covers and walks to the centre of the stage. John leaves the story of Jesus speaking to kneeling Thomas as a freeze-frame moment in our minds' eye. And those words still resonating in our mind's ear:

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 believed.”

(John 20:28-29)

A bit like those interviews with film producers that you get as extra material in the DVD of the film. Only it's John, in person, on the stage before us, telling us about the making of his book. What he included, and what he didn't include, and why. Here's the *what*

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ...

(John 20:30)

Just in case we wondered. There's plenty more stuff that didn't make the director's cut. So, John, why keep *these particular* scenes in?

... but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

(John 20:31)

Do you see what he's saying here?

Overhead: title

This could be you, believing this. Of course, we've only looked at one snippet of the book, and I'd recommend you take a while to read the whole of it, slowly, carefully, reflectively, thoughtfully. See what *you* make of this Jesus.

But John has particularly chosen *these* things that are particularly important and particularly convincing. Plenty of stuff that is interesting enough, that I'm sure we would have loved to read, but no, *these* are written because *this* could be *you*.

... but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

(John 20:31)

Yes, John does have an agenda. He wants to offer *you* the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ. He wants *you* to have life in Jesus Christ by believing. Notice that, not by doing church or loads of religious stuff – though, if you become a believer in Jesus, following Jesus together with other believers will follow, just as will generally what could be a substantial change of lifestyle. But underlying all of that is believing, personally committing all that you are and have to Jesus, and trusting that when he died on the cross he alone did absolutely everything that is necessary to put you right with God.

Could be, of course, that you didn't even realise you were in the *wrong* with God. In which case, all I can say at this point, is *read the whole of the book*. Start with John where John starts, and see what a difference that will make to your understanding.

And we've actually sung about what this believing in Jesus Christ, and entering life through him, will be like. That song we started with, each verse, talks about thankfulness.

We've been here to specially give thanks to God today for the life of Jowan, and to pray for him and the people who are going to be involved in his life. But we sang about thankfulness in much broader terms, too:

*My heart is filled with thankfulness
To him who bore my pain;*

*Who plumbed the depths of my disgrace
And gave me life again:
Who crushed my curse of sinfulness
And clothed me with his light,
And wrote his law of righteousness
With power upon my heart.*

Folks, that could be you singing that for real, not just mouthing the words.

*My heart is filled with thankfulness
To him who walks beside;
Who floods my weaknesses with strength
And causes fears to fly,
Whose every promise is enough
For every step I take,
Sustaining me with arms of love
And crowning me with grace.*

Folks, *that* could be you, too. Not just sin dealt with, but life in the care and provision of a heavenly Father.

*My heart is filled with thankfulness
To him who reigns above;
Whose wisdom is my perfect peace,
Whose every thought is love.*

There is that heavenly Father. And how it is possible for *you* to relate to him. And *this* could be you, too, those closing lines of the song:

*For every day I have on earth
Is given by the King;
So I will give my life, my all,
To love and follow him.*

This *could* be you. But will you? Or will you at least resolve that you will, at a high priority, check out whether this does make sense of life as we see it around us and see it within ourselves, too. Because what I've said today, even though far less potent than John's inspired words, have the same objective:

... so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

(John 20:31)

Folks, this really *must* be you.