

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 1st May 2022

A friend of mine who lives in the leafy London suburb of London, was very chuffed a few weeks ago when she was in her local branch of Waitrose and in her shopping trolley, with all the grocery shop for the week, she had several bottles of wine. When she got to the checkout, the young assistant asked her for proof of identity – my dear friend, a mother of two, and 42 years of age was quite taken aback, but she was happy to produce it!

No wonder she went back to the car with a broad smile and a spring in her step.

I have never been asked that question – sadly.

If I wanted to prove to someone who I am, I could show them my passport and the awful photograph it contains, along with my signature, proof that it is really me. When I look at that photo, I ask myself, “Would I buy a second hand car from this man?”

I have a photo on my Driver’s Licence too.

Often we are asked for identification, sometimes a signature, sometimes a photograph.

And when we are online, of course, we have to type in our passwords – and I am awful at remembering them!

Even famous people aren’t always recognised.

She may be one of the most famous faces in the world, but the Queen has often got away without being identified or recognised.

Her former protection officer, Richard Griffin, has revealed how Her Majesty once encountered a group of American tourists while she was dressed in a headscarf and tweeds while out walking on the estate near Balmoral Castle.

The tourists asked her, “Do you live around here?”

And the incognito Sovereign simply replied that she had a house nearby.

“Have you ever met the Queen?” they asked excitedly.

“No”, she replied, then pointing to her policeman, she quipped, “But he has!”

During the Second World War, the people of the United Kingdom had to carry with them Identity Cards so that if they were stopped by the police or the authorities, they could say who they were.

I heard a wonderful story of an elderly couple from Glasgow who were on holiday in Largs during the war, and were standing in the queue in the butcher's to get their meat ration. They had their ration book, but as they were visiting the town, they had to have other means of identification. When they got up to the counter, the wee lady said to the butcher, "It's ok. We are on holiday, but I have got my NON ENTITY card!"

Every one of us has an identity.

On the Sunday that Jesus rose from the grave, He appeared that evening to His disciples who were hiding in the Upper Room, still scared about all that had been going on...still watching for the turn of the door handle in case the Roman soldiers were coming to arrest them too.

One of the disciples, Thomas, whose name means "The Twin", was not with them. We are not told where he was. Perhaps he had wanted to go off by himself as he was so grief stricken that Jesus was dead; perhaps he was so upset that all the dreams and plans which he had for Jesus had come to nothing; perhaps he had just gone off to get some food for supper.

And when Thomas returned to the room and the others told him that they had seen Jesus and that He was alive, Thomas said, "I won't believe it until I see it with my own eyes. I want to see the nail-prints in His hands and put my hand in the place where the spear was thrust into His side."

Thomas said, "Is this some kind of sick joke? Dead men don't rise! Wait a minute! Hold on!"

Thomas thought the others had lost it completely.

Well, a week later, Jesus appeared to His disciples again.

This time, Thomas was present, and Jesus said to him, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Put your hand into my side. Stop doubting and believe!"

Suddenly, Thomas, the star sceptic, did not need tangible proof, and he simply shouted, "My Lord and my God!"

Thomas was now a believer.

The one who was full of doubts was now convinced of Jesus' victory.

There are a lot of people today who won't believe that Jesus was really raised from the dead, because they have not seen Him with their own eyes.

They want "proof of identity" before they will believe.

And Jesus said "Blessed are those who have not seen, yet believe!"

Well, that includes you and me.

We have not seen Jesus with our own eyes, yet we believe that He is alive and He is at work in our world and in our lives today.

That is what is called faith.

You know, it is ok to ask questions about God and Jesus. It is ok to sometimes have doubts. God understands when we do.

Many of the greatest Christians who have ever lived have known doubts in their lives.

Mother Theresa has always fascinated me.

She never claimed to have seen Jesus with His scarred hands and side, but she vowed that she discerned Him daily in all His distressing guises – as a filthy beggar covered in maggots; as a homeless child eating litter off the streets. When she died, we learned that this saintly little lady was often plagued by doubts during her life, but that life was a living testament to Jesus' words, "Whatever you do for the least of these who are members of my family, you do it for me."

Those people were proof of Jesus' identity to that little nun.

If we want to see Jesus, God gives us glimpses of Him every day.

In that young man who sits outside Tesco on the Main Street most days.

In the frightened face of that old lady, in the cellar in Kyiv.

In the caring presence of a friend;

In the compassionate care of a doctor, or a MacMillan Nurse.

In the forgiveness of a loved one;

In the wisdom of a parent;

In the love of someone close who is always there for us, even in our worst moments.

In these folk, He still comes to us. He can be easily recognised. His identity is crystal clear.

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister