

### Address for Second Sunday of Easter (Low Sunday) - 2020

After Pentecost we don't hear of Thomas again in the Biblical text. With Peter and the other disciples, he is filled with the Spirit and sent to take the good news of Jesus Christ to all the world

Legend has it that Thomas made his way to India, landing in the area that is now Goa, and making his way across the country, telling people of God's love in Jesus – that love he witnessed for himself.

He died in Chennai, on the hill now named St Thomas Mount – martyred while at prayer. But the church that he started, the Mar Thoma church, exists to this day.

The Churches in Cambridgeshire have had a special link with the churches in India since 1990. The Cambridgeshire Ecumenical Council are linked by covenant with the Diocese of Vellore in the Church of South India. Although the Mar Thoma church isn't part of the Church of South India, all the Christians – whatever denomination, feel that they owe their faith and existence to St Thomas. St Thomas' recognition of the risen Jesus as Lord and God led him to witness to the people in India. As they recognise Jesus with them as Lord and God, today's Christians are called to witness afresh.

This is Rev Paul Whittle, Moderator of the Eastern Synod of the URC, and current Chair of the Ecumenical Council, and Bishop Sharma, elected Bishop in Vellore last summer. As well as its many churches, the diocese of Vellore has primary and secondary schools, a college, training courses for school leavers, an agricultural college and 3 hospitals. They work amongst people of all faiths, sharing Jesus love in all its fullness to those who are the poorest of the poor.



In the centre of Vellore is the Christian Medical College hospital, started by Dr Ida Scudder. It is now one of the foremost hospitals in South Asia. In the current situation, it is one of the COVID-19 testing centres.

This picture is in the tiny Christian hospital in Vandavasi. The artist felt as if Christ was present in the touch and care of the hospital staff



And Christ has to be. Social distancing is a prerogative of richer people. We had some visitors from Vellore with us as the coronavirus was beginning to take hold in India. One was a nurse from CMC, Vellore. She commented 'how can the people in the slums in Vellore and the other cities practice social distancing when they have no water, no sanitation and live with so many people in a house?'

India experienced lockdown suddenly, with 4 hours' notice. The majority of labour force in India are daily wage workers, many are migrants come to the cities for whatever work they can find. Some have travelled across many states.



They earn enough to feed their families for that day – but they have no money set aside to keep them going in harsh times.

With no means of support, most of the daily wage workers wanted to get themselves and their families back to their villages, but there was little in the way of transport to help.

The bishop urged the churches to gather what resources they could – particularly hand sanitizer, face masks etc – for the hospitals

And this is why. This is an isolation ward, prepared and ready, in one of the Christian hospitals.

The bishop also urged the churches to feed the hungry – the migrants and daily wage labourers who have nothing to eat. In fact, he told the churches to put aside building projects and share what they have with the poor. Here, one of the priests, Isaac, is preparing a meal for migrants and for the police.



Sacraments become strange things – below, the bishop offers hand sanitizer to the market sellers near his house....

Irrespective of faith – these ladies are being given face masks.

And families are offered ‘life in all its fullness’ – here in the shape of food parcels rice and lentils and spices to give them meals.



We covenant

- to pray regularly for one another;
- to strengthen the links of Christian Fellowship,
- to exchange ideas and learn from each other’s Christian experiences,
- to give mutual support and encouragement to one another.

As we sit with St Thomas, in front of the scarred Jesus and say with awe ‘My Lord and my God’, let’s remember brothers and sisters in many parts of the world – but particularly those we are in a covenant with, in India, responding to their vision of Christ by service, as St Thomas did.