

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, September 27, 2026

Patronal Feast Day

Procession and Solemn Eucharist

4:00 pm

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A Sermon by

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Dame Sarah Mullally, *DBE, The Archbishop of Canterbury*
on

Isaiah 43:8-13; John 14:1-7

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Archbishop of Canterbury's sermon at Saint Thomas Fifth Avenue Sunday 27th September 2026, The Patronal Feast of Saint Thomas the Apostle

May I begin by saying how grateful I am for this opportunity to join with you in worship here at Saint Thomas Church. Thank you, Father Carl, for your kind invitation. It is a joy to celebrate with you as you mark your patronal festival; to share with members of your congregation and community, as well as with colleagues from the Cathedral and neighbouring parishes. I have enjoyed previous visits with you during my time as the Bishop of London, but it is a particular joy to be here with you today, as Archbishop of Canterbury, and to mark this festival with you.

May I speak in the name of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' (John 14.5)

Before my installation as Archbishop of Canterbury in March, I walked 140 kilometres from St Paul's Cathedral in London to Canterbury Cathedral. As I set foot on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral and down the hill towards the river Thames, I knew my destination was Canterbury, I knew the pilgrimage paths that we were walking, I knew I was preparing for my installation – but I didn't know the exact route we would follow.

As someone who has walked a lot – and with a husband who walks around 30km a day and is at present taking a break from walking from Canterbury to Jerusalem – I must admit not knowing the exact route was a little disconcerting.

There was, of course, a whole team of people who had planned the route; mapped out the stops; coordinated visits with churches and schools; organised accommodation; and so, in a sense they took this worry from me. It enabled me to focus on walking, on praying, on preparing for my installation.

It became an unexpected lesson in trust – trusting that the route and the places to stop would work out as planned; trusting that the person with the map knew the best path to take; trusting that the ancient paths we were following would lead us to our destination.

As I walked, it struck me – as it often does on pilgrimage – that the way, the journey itself – as much as the destination, is where the spiritual work happens. It is while we are on the way that we encounter God, both in our own spiritual searching, and in our relationships with others. What took me by surprise was

how my walk captured the imagination of people not just in the UK, but across the world. In some way, my ordinary actions gave people access to the Church and to God – I am still reflecting on what this means for my ministry and the ministry of the Church.

I wonder if, just as St James is associated with the great Camino de Santiago, we might also think of Thomas as a 'saint of pilgrimage':

'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' (John 14.5)

Thomas has a good habit of asking probing questions. He's often known as 'doubting Thomas', but I like to think of him as someone who is curious, inquisitive – as the one who is bold enough to ask the questions that many were just thinking.

In this Gospel encounter, Thomas asks Jesus this question about 'the way' – and about where it leads and how we can know it? Where does Thomas' question come from? Why is he so concerned to ask?

In the previous chapter, Jesus has washed his disciples' feet; he has dipped the morsel of bread in the dish and spoken of betrayal; he has predicted Peter's denial; he has told the disciples to 'love one another as I have loved you'; and now he has spoken of his departure, of 'going ahead to prepare a place for them'.

I imagine all the disciples were wondering what Jesus meant by his words, by these foreboding actions: Where was Jesus going? Would they be able to go too? What did this mean for their life together?

Thomas is the one who asks the question out loud. And Thomas's question leads into the most profound self-revelation of Jesus: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life'.

I think Thomas asks the question that many of us find ourselves asking in our own lives. How do we know the way we should go? How do we discern the right path in our life? How do we follow Jesus when we're not sure where it will lead? These kinds of questions can arise from doubt or confusion; from anxiety or fear; from deep curiosity or a simple desire for change.

And often, like Thomas, there is both a desire to know the destination and wanting to know how we're going to get there.

Knowing the way isn't simply a revelation from on high, or a voice calling to us in the night, it is sometimes finding our way together, seeking wisdom in our journeying together. In this Gospel account, the way is both the journey and the destination.

When Jesus says he is 'the way', it is more than just self-revelation – Jesus is saying who he is, but also what he does. Jesus is himself 'the way', and he is the one – the only one – who makes a way to the Father.

As followers of Jesus, we can't make it alone in our journey to the Father – we do it in relationship with Jesus, and with each other. Jesus invites us to abide in him, he assures us that he will abide in us, and he commands us to love one another just as he has loved us: this is 'the way' of Jesus, the way of indwelling love, of walking with God and into God, and with each other.

What we do know about the way is that it is not always straightforward. Even if we have our eyes on our destination – the journey can be challenging, we can make mistakes, take the wrong turns, we can feel overwhelmed by what lies before us. As followers of Jesus, we might at times feel lost or confused and it is

in these times that we need one another. Just as I learned on my pilgrimage, I had to rely on others to manage the details, to keep an eye on the map, to support one another as we walked together.

I recall one lovely moment when two young school children were walking along beside me – one had lots of energy and the other had not much at all – so they were holding each other's hands, they told me – one to give energy to the other; one to help the other calm down! We need one another as we walk the path of faith. That, for me, is the joy of the Anglican Communion – the joy of our life together in Christ.

Jesus recognises the anxiety the disciples feel, and he speaks directly to it: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God and believe also in me'. These words frame the whole encounter with Jesus. Jesus recognises their fear, and encourages them to believe, to trust, not only in God in whom they put their trust; but also in him, who is the way to that promised hope.

Building on the words of the prophet Isaiah, Jesus assures His disciples that He is their hope, He is their saviour, He is the one in whom they can trust:

Jesus is Lord, besides him there is no Saviour. And, at the same time as knowing this, we also know that walking the way of Jesus doesn't promise to be easy – our life-long pilgrimage will bring joy, confidence and boldness in faith; but it will bring doubts, confusion, questions and fears.

When Jesus says, 'I am the way', we know – and Thomas will discover as the story unfurls – that the 'way' of Jesus is the way of the cross. It is a way that shoulders the burdens of the world; it is a way that bears the wounds of sin in the resurrected body of Jesus. To walk the way of Jesus, is then, to walk the way of the cross, and the way of the resurrection in the glorious wounds of Christ.

As a church here in the heart of New York City, you know something of what it is to walk this way of the wounded body of Jesus.

It is especially moving to be here by the memorial dedicated by one of my predecessors as Archbishop of Canterbury, and to see engraved the words of our beloved late Queen Elizabeth II: 'Grief is the price we pay for love'. Those words carved into stone are the indelible sign of the bonds of history, love and affection that exist between our two nations – and our two churches.

You have walked the way of faith in response to the atrocities of 9/11, 25 years ago. You have walked the way of Jesus carrying with you the pain and suffering of our world; you have walked the way of hope, offering the healing and salvation promised in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As with so many people, I can never forget the images from that horrific day, especially of people fleeing the disaster, and those running towards danger to help people who were trapped. You of all people have asked the question: 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, show us the way'.

You asked that question on that day, as did the world, and I'm sure you have asked that question every day since. We are still asking that question today.

Perhaps you have received less an answer than an assurance that we need one another on the journey. No one person can undertake that journey alone. Even Moses, even Isaiah, even Jesus himself calling disciples, knew that human beings need one another on the pilgrimage through the world, that at times is a walk through 'a barren land'.

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Centre, the Episcopal Church responded by opening your doors, providing comfort and shelter, offering spaces for first responders – and, still to this day, 25 years on – you are walking with those who lost loved ones – offering hope, healing and comfort to those who still carry the wounds of that day in their hearts.

In Jesus we know the Father; in Jesus we see God – the love of God, not distanced from the brokenness of the world, but choosing emptiness, humility and the cross as the way of salvation.

And so, we give thanks for Thomas, who shows us what it means to walk towards difficult questions, the doubts and the fears we face. We give thanks for Thomas, who, when the other disciples were hiding in fear, asked the Lord to show him his wounds. Praise God for Thomas, who walks towards the wounded body of Christ and reaching out his hand to touch the brokenness, finds words of faith: 'My Lord and My God'.

As we journey with Thomas, may we follow the one who is the way. When the route isn't clear or the journey feels uncertain, may we trust in the one whose way is truth; when we feel anxious or afraid, may we hear the promise of the one whose way is life. Let us then together, walk in this way.

Amen.
