

Sunday, April 26, 2026

## Thomas: Doubting or Daring?

John 20:24-29

I know I've told about the car rides Toby and I would take to Andover while we were dating and then newly married, and how we would talk about our faith. I'm not sure if I ever shared something that I said to Toby ... Having been raised Catholic, we were never asked if we had had that personal moment when we turned to Jesus as our Savior.

We would be confirmed in middle school, maybe 13 or 14 years old. This was when we made the "adult" decision to follow Jesus. Now, I guess, they will confirm a child as young as nine. First, I have no problem with this if it is actually a child's decision and they understand what they are saying. But, that's not the conversation Toby and I had.

What I admitted to him, as a full-on adult, was my worry - what if I wasn't really saved? As far back as I can remember, I knew Jesus Christ had died for my sins. I knew that nothing I could do would be as wonderful as what Jesus had done - and I wasn't worthy. But did I actually ever invite Jesus into my heart? There was a tiny drop of doubt.

What Toby said next put my heart at ease and directed me to invite Jesus in - maybe for the first time, but probably just a renewal. He said, just stop now and ask Him in ... as simple as that; my doubt turned to courage, I said a simple prayer to Jesus - and then I was sure.

Not the same kind of doubt, but my memories remind me of Thomas. In today's Gospel, Thomas doubted. He needed the surety, the reality of Jesus' resurrection for him to believe.

Having full belief doesn't mean we will never again have a moment that seems a little like doubt or confusion. I remember many a Bible study around Betty Richardson's dining room table where some of us would look at a passage and say it was a metaphor, a parable, an allegory ... it was a way for God to tell us something in a way that we could understand ... or at least in a way that the Jewish people could understand. But others would say, No! This is exactly what happened - not a story. Our conversations didn't mean to put any kind of doubt in our minds, but rather make us more excited to find out the reality of it all, one day, when we bravely and joyfully sit at God's feet.

It is not sin to turn to God and ask for more understanding, maybe even something like proof. It is not sinful to be confused when it seems that our prayers aren't answered the way we thought they would be, or when a friend abandons us, or a loved one dies unexpectedly, or we can't figure out the next step in our lives.

It's actually quite daring to spit in Satan's face as he sows seeds of doubt in our minds and we instead trust that God will give us the encouragement, and, if not the understanding, at least the confidence to accept what Jesus teaches us.

But there are those things, those basic foundational truths found in Scripture, that give us hope and excite our hearts to endure all we suffer here on earth, while we follow God's calling for our lives.

So, it's said that Thomas doubted ... but didn't the other apostles believe because they had already seen?

What we didn't talk about last week was how Jesus' disciples had hid in fear - scared to death. The Jewish authorities had just tortured and murdered their leader - Jesus Christ! What would happen to them?

When Jesus was arrested, they ran, they denied knowing Him. When He was murdered and buried, they hid behind closed doors - filled with fear. And *Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

The kind of fear that they had felt doesn't just go away without something dramatic happening! They looked at the scars on Jesus' hands, His feet and on His side ... the marks of the nails that pierced Him; markings that remained after He arose, markings that weren't necessary on Jesus' perfect body, and they knew that this was really their friend, their teacher ... the man they had followed for the last three years! They were filled with joy! They knew that this was truly the living Jesus before them and they were forever transformed.

But where was Thomas? We don't know for sure why he wasn't with the others. He doesn't even have his friends to be with as he grieves. He's alone, traumatized, filled with confusion and anxiety.

I remember when Toby's intestines burst and we rushed to the hospital. I let my parents know what had happened, but when they offered to come sit with me, I told them no.

I probably would have been happy to have them there, but for the moment, I needed to sit in my fear of the unknown and in the confidence that God had this, alone. I really couldn't explain it. Was that what Thomas was doing? Did he need to be alone in this moment?

But, if Thomas had been with the others when Jesus appeared, he too would have believed. On the other, if any of the others had been with Thomas, or by themselves, would they have responded any differently than Thomas had?

Not much is told about Thomas through the Gospels.

In the Gospel of John Chapter 11:16, a little before His death, Jesus insists on going to Judea after His good friend, Lazarus, has died. The disciples know that this isn't a smart move. The last time Jesus went to Judea, the Jews tried to stone Him. But Jesus is determined to go and Thomas says, *"Let us also go, that we may die with Him."* Instead of a doubting man, we see a man filled with courage, conviction and daring. And then they witnessed Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead.

We find Thomas again in John 14. Jesus is telling the disciples that He is going to prepare a place for them in His Father's house and that they already know this. *"Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him.'"* Jesus has told Thomas that by seeing Jesus, he has seen God.

So, the disciples tell Thomas that three days after the crucifixion they have seen Jesus alive. Of course, Thomas wants to see for himself. Seeing Jesus means seeing God! Having any kind of doubt does not mean that Thomas did not love his dear friend and teacher, Jesus! And even though Thomas has been named the Doubter, this seems to me another example of Thomas being faithful and courageous.

In Luke 21:8, Jesus told His disciples, *"Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and 'The time is near!' Do not go after them."* Thomas probably didn't want to be led astray. He's going to test to make sure this is truly the Risen Christ!

Thomas wasn't there to see Jesus enter the locked room. He didn't see the wounds on Jesus' hands and side. When the other disciples tell Thomas what has happened, Thomas tells them, *"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."* Eight days later, Jesus gives Thomas physical proof.

Jesus wants all of us to have faith – but not blind faith. He wants us to be aware that false teachers are going to be everywhere. He certainly wouldn't want us counting ourselves among those "drinking the Kool-Aid."

Thomas believed what he saw. The other disciples rejoiced at seeing Jesus alive, but Thomas is the only one who proclaims *"My Lord and My God."* Thomas believed that Jesus has risen and that Jesus is Lord.

We are blessed because we believe without seeing. It would be wonderful to see and sit at His feet – and someday, if we believe, we will sit with Jesus.

During the low points of our lives, it would be comforting to actually see Jesus. Wanting a sign, a proof of His presence, doesn't mean we don't have faith. I know Toby loves me, but when I'm not feeling so well, his arms around me help me.

I'm not alone desiring to see and feel the presence of Jesus Christ in my life. Sometimes the faithful struggle with their belief. This may be our way to be closer to God – asking questions, asking for reassurance, yearning for His presence, reaching for His hand.

Scripture says: *A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."*

Jesus didn't criticize or ridicule Thomas for his unbelief. Instead, Jesus invited Thomas to:

*"Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."* Jesus gave Thomas the same proof the others had received.

Looking at the painting on the front of today's bulletin, we see Thomas probing Jesus' gashed side with an almost intimacy. Scripture doesn't actually say that Thomas took Jesus up on His offer to touch his scars, though.

And let's think about this ... poor Thomas is called the Doubter, but in Luke 24:10-11, we can read: *Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.*

And in Mark 16:13, after Jesus appeared to two of His disciples, it's said: *And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.*

He wasn't the only one who had his doubts.

It's better to voice our doubts aloud than to silently disbelieve. Jesus may put someone or something in our lives to help us.

Casting Crowns sings a song, "Praise You In This Storm."

*I was sure by now God you would have reached down*

*And wiped our tears away,*

*Stepped in and saved the day.*

*But once again, I say amen*

*That it's still raining*

*As the thunder rolls*

*I barely hear your whisper through the rain*

*I'm with you*

*And as your mercy falls*

*I raise my hands and praise*

*The God who gives and takes away*

*And I'll praise you in this storm*

*And I will lift my hands*

*That you are who you are*

*No matter where I am*

*And every tear I've cried*

*You hold in your hand*

*You never left my side*

*And though my heart is torn*

*I will praise you in this storm.*

And just as Toby told me that if I wasn't sure I had made my own declaration, Thomas then made his own personal confession of faith. He didn't say, "He is Lord, He is God" or "You are Lord, You are God." He said, "*MY Lord, MY God!*" It's the language of delight, of joy, of amazement ... of repentance and of faith!!

Thomas had Jesus' wounds to give him proof of His resurrection. Sometimes we need something physical, too, to remind us of Jesus' nearness – a Bible, a prayer shawl, devotional books, music, a prayer corner that's all our own – a trusted friend, someone we can talk to and share with – to celebrate the good times with us and encourage us during the rough times.

At the end of today's passage, Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" Blessed ... Happy, supremely fortunate, filled with joy.

So "*Happy, filled with joy, are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" He's talking about us!!! Jesus doesn't say that those who believe without seeing are more faithful, are better people, are better Christians. He says they are happy. The worry of doubt doesn't fill their minds.

In 1 Peter 1:8 Joe read: *Although you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.*

Not seeing Jesus doesn't stop us from loving Him, from finding life-changing delight and joy in Him. That's a good place to be, but asking God to make His presence known in our lives is not a sin.

God's presence may be made known to us through a hand, a hug – something we all yearn for right. God's presence is in the love of another person, a relationship that changes our lives.

Where will you meet Jesus?

Will He appear in a locked room to talk to you? Has He appeared in a hospital while you were volunteering? Will He be there when you bring food to someone in need? Will He sit alongside you while you worship? Do you see Jesus in the faces of those you serve? Do you have faith that He will be there?

With one touch, Thomas knew and believed that Jesus stood in his presence, that Jesus had not abandoned them. He didn't reprimand him, reject him or even kick Thomas out of the group. Jesus was kind and patient and that's how Jesus is with us, too.

When we are anxious, scared, confused ... maybe a little doubting ... we can trust in God's presence.

Instead of being labeled "doubters," we can daringly say that we have witnessed the resurrection in our lives, we have felt the true presence of our Lord and Savior and we desire to see that resurrection in the lives of those we love, in our community and in our world!

Today's passage ends with this: *But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*