

Easter 2

Trust the Word!

John 20:19-31

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

Pilate politics. I didn't know that this was an actual thing. But it is mentioned occasionally in news articles or, put more simply, just accusing someone of being a “Pilate.” It references Pilate's weak decision to wash his hands of the decision to kill Jesus based on the backlash from the Jewish crowd. Pilate is one of those people in the Bible whose actions transcend the Bible and find themselves in everyday allusions. They become a caricature of the person.

And there are quite a few of them in Scripture where the language and caricature has crept into the vernacular. Quoted on TV, and Film, in literature, and in everyday situations. People like weak Pilate, or wis Solomon, or two-faced Judas. One of the most famous, or more accurately, infamous, is Thomas. And already hearing that name, you can already think of the phrase. Thomas? Doubting Thomas! The guy who doubted that Jesus was alive until he saw proof of it.

And it's a bit of a shame that he has such a sullied reputation for this one event in his life. Thomas was a faithful follower of Christ! While he is not mentioned by name often in many of the New Testament accounts, we know some things about him. Thomas was one of those 12 men. One of those 12 men whom Jesus selected. One of the 12 dropped their occupations and left to follow Jesus. He sat and listened to Jesus. He heard his parables and

asked questions, as many of them did. Not only that, but he saw miracles, feeding five thousand and healing the sick and handicapped.

He was also a confident and bold man. In John 11, Jesus is on his way to heal Lazarus. But his disciples are afraid and say he shouldn't go because they tried to stone him the last time he was in the area. And who speaks up but Thomas: "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Thomas was confident. Thomas had experience. Thomas was a faithful servant.

But Thomas was also around for some other events. Some events that we pondered quietly over a week ago. Thomas was there in the Garden when he saw Jesus betrayed and arrested. Thomas was around when Jesus was on the cross. Thomas was around when the disciples feared that the Jews who had just killed magnificent Jesus would soon be after them too.

And there is where we find Thomas with a vastly changed worldview. With some tragic events that have forced him to think. Jesus was dead. He knew that for a fact. But as we know from the glorious Easter Sunday, he rose! He rose from death and even appeared to 11 disciples who were hiding in fear. But Thomas, faithful Thomas, heartbroken Thomas, wasn't there. When the disciples come in and proclaim: "We have seen the Lord!" It's here that the doubt is too much: **"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."**

Can you blame Thomas? Can you blame him for having trouble believing what the apostles said? It went against everything that he had just encountered, and now he just has to take the word of the others?

It's easy to poke fun at Thomas. It's easy to think it was crazy to doubt the reality of the resurrection, though he had seen so many miracles. And even though he had the promises of his fellow disciples that he was alive. But how often have we been Thomas? Perhaps not outright. But in silent, subtle ways, we have.

It happens when our natural human minds clash and roar against the truth of Holy Scripture. And we, like Thomas, want that proof. We want Jesus to come and metaphorically appear before us, so we can put our fingers in the holes in his hands and touch his side where the spear pierced him. God, I'm really struggling with the idea of a six-day miraculous creation. Could you just give me something concrete, something to hold up against evolution. Lord, if you could show me something. Some miracles that prove without a shadow of a doubt that you are real and that you are there. God, if you could give me a

sign, something that shows me that there is heaven, that my loved one is there right now. Lord, let me put my finger where the nails were; let me put my hand in your side.

But as strong as those doubts are. Even stronger is the love and grace of our God. **Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”** God knows the fears and doubts that Thomas has in his mind. And Jesus has no problem showing up for a party of one.

Even though Thomas doubts and is weak, God shows up for one. Jesus shows up just for Thomas to put away all of his doubts. Despite all of his struggles in his faith, even though he had no reason to doubt his promises, no reason to doubt the words of the other disciples, Jesus still came to that room with a gentle grace. Showing Thomas, yes, I am alive. Yes, I have risen from death. Yes, your sins of doubt are forgiven.

What does the account of Thomas teach us? It shows us a couple of things primarily. 1 Jesus shows up for just one. Even in your doubts, even in your fear, you are important to him. Even in your weakness of faith, in your uncertainty, in your ambiguity, he will show up for you. He will show up totally for you, just for you. Jesus never thinks that your doubts and struggles aren't enough for him to comfort and reassure.

2 Very practically, trust the testimony of the apostles. Thomas doubted that what his fellow disciples were saying was true. But what they had told him was the truth. And what is the way that the apostles speak to you? It is that inspired Word of God that we gather around every week in the Gospel. **Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

John is not saying he wrote down everything that you could possibly want. He is not saying that there won't be questions or things that are hard to believe. But what he is saying is that these are written for you and for your faith. The words recorded in Scripture are the very words through which the Holy Spirit works to create faith. Through these words of the Gospel, the Spirit promises to come to you, yes, you as an individual, and strengthen your faith in your Savior. The Bible bears witness to those great events that acted for humanity's salvation. John wrote these things to feed your faith, to make you know that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died for your sins.

So when you hear that name, Thomas. I want to try to break you out of jumping to doubting Thomas. I pray that when you hear the name of Thomas, you think of grace. Thomas shows that Jesus cares about every individual. He is willing to show up for just one, to silence fears, to quell doubts. Thomas shows me that Jesus is my risen Lord. I can trust his Word. Amen.