

THOMAS John 20:19-31

If I were to mention the names of certain disciples to you and ask you to write down the first word that comes into your mind, it is unlikely you would come up with the same or similar words. If I were to mention the name of Judas many of you would write down the word "betray". If I were to mention Simon Peter, some of you would write down the word "faith," but not all of you. If I were to mention the names of James and John, some of you would write down the phrase "Sons of Thunder." Now when I mention the word Thomas, there is little question about the word most everyone would write down. It would be the word doubt. Indeed, so closely have we associated Thomas with this word, that we have coined a phrase to describe him: "Doubting Thomas."

You may be interested to know that in the first three gospels we are told absolutely nothing at all about Thomas. It is in John's Gospel that he emerges as a distinct personality, but even then there are only 155 words about him. There is not a lot about this disciple in the Bible but there is more than one description.

When Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem the disciples thought that it would be certain death for all of them. Surprisingly, it was Thomas who said: Then let us go so that we may die with him. It was a courageous statement, yet we don't remember him for that. We also fail to point out that in this story of Thomas' doubt we have the one place in the all the Gospels where the Divinity of Christ is bluntly and unequivocally stated. It is interesting, is it not, that the story that gives Thomas his infamous nickname, is the same story that has Thomas making an earth shattering confession of faith? Look at his confession, "My Lord, and my God." Not Rabbounni (teacher). Not Lord. Not Messiah. But God! *It is the only place where Jesus is called God without qualification of any kind!*- don't take my word for it; look it up! It is uttered with conviction as if

Thomas was simply recognizing a fact, just as $2 + 2 = 4$, and the sun is in the sky. You are my Lord and my God! These are certainly not the words of a doubter.

Now let me add a few more facts concerning this misunderstood disciple. The traditional sign of St. Thomas is a **spear** and a **carpenter's square**, nothing that would indicate a doubt in his faith. This seems to be based on the probability that he made two journeys to the east. The first was to north India where he was the carpenter who built a palace for Godnophores (Greek name), and as a result the king was baptized as a Christian. His next journey was by ship across to the south west coast of India. You can still visit the seven churches in Kerala which were founded by this great apostle. And you can also visit the place in Madras where he was speared to death by his enemies.

Unfortunately history has remembered him for this scene where the resurrected Christ made an appearance to the disciples in a home in Jerusalem. Thomas was not present and when he heard about the event he refused to believe it. Maybe the news simply sounded too good to be true. Thomas said: Unless I feel the nail prints in his hands I will not believe.

Now I cannot help but notice that Thomas has separated himself from the disciples and therefore, in his solitude, missed the resurrection appearance. I think that John is suggesting to us that Christ appears most often within the community of believers that we call the church, and when we separate ourselves from the church we take a chance on missing his unique presence.

But the story doesn't end here. The second time Jesus made his appearance Thomas was present with the disciples and this time he too witnessed the event. This time he believed. What can we learn from the life of Thomas?

- Three truths: 1. Jesus did not blame him.
2. The most endearing things in life can never be proven.
3. We must move beyond doubt to faith.

Thomas was not present with the other apostles when the risen Jesus came among them the first Easter evening. And during the next few days Thomas refused to believe the eye witness account of the other apostles. "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" (**John 20:25**). As a result Thomas is often called Doubting Thomas, as if doubt is not something Christians should ever experience. We all have doubts from time to time, and there is nothing wrong with questioning and doubting. The important thing is to have our doubts about resurrection resolved.

How did Thomas have his doubt removed? And what gave him the faith to make two very dangerous journeys to India to announce the certainty of the resurrection? It's relatively simple: **Jesus did not blame him for his doubt**, but came to him right where he was in faith, loving him just the way he was. And in showing Thomas unconditional love, moved him from doubt to faith.

It is this time of year that we witness the impossible for the true skeptics of spring; crinkly daffodil bulbs become yellow daffodils once again, a seemingly impossible feat from the ice-cold ground of the Adirondacks, if we had not witnessed this miracle many times before. In other words, once you have seen it happen, you have the faith to plant bulbs in the fall and expect them to come out in the spring. For the apostles seeing was believing. They saw Jesus' resurrection body, and they had faith in their own resurrection. But we were not there to see the unbelievable resurrection event happen.

The second point: So we can agree that the most endearing things of life can never be proven.

Most of what we believe depends on the evidence of reliable eye witnesses. How many of you believe that astronauts have walked on the moon? You were not there on the moon to see, but you believed the newspaper and television reports. You have never been to Ethiopia, but you believe the news that people are dying of starvation. At first Thomas did not accept the report of the other eye-witness disciples, even though they were personal friends, because resurrection was too much for a practical minded carpenter to believe. But eventually he himself took the news of what had happened to the people of north and south India.

Immediately following the story of Thomas, the writer of the Gospel tells us: "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). ***The third point: we must move from doubt to faith!***

It is by reading the accounts of the resurrection in the four Gospels that millions have come to faith in Jesus' resurrection from the tomb, and their own resurrection when they die.

But there is a third kind of certainty that comes by personal encounter. Imagine you read in the Hamilton Valley News that a man was being lowered into the grave in the Airdeville Cemetery, and suddenly he pushed the casket lid open, jumped out, and greeted the mourners. You would naturally refuse to believe that a man who had died of heart failure could resurrect like that from death. But your curiosity grips you and you decide to call him. "Are you the man who was reported as jumping out of your grave?" After answering half a dozen questions, he invites you

join him the next day for coffee at King of the Frosties. Now he goes over the story, shows you the medical records, and his wife assures you he had indeed died of heart failure but now he is fit and well. Although the account seems as unbelievable as a caterpillar coming out of a cocoon as a butterfly, your reasonable doubt might eventually turn to certainty. But would you still be as certain of this event ten years later?

Thomas had heard the evidence of eye witnesses, and the next Sunday he actually met the same Jesus who had been crucified, bled to death, and buried in a sealed tomb. That was sufficient to send him out on his mission to India. But he must have had doubts during those long dangerous journeys. "Was it wishful thinking? Was I dreaming? Was it a psychological trick?" Even if he had the Gospel of Matthew with him, as now seems possible, rereading the story of the resurrection might not settle his doubts. But if Jesus is alive, and he has the resurrection body of heaven, then it should be possible to talk to him personally.

"Jesus, I am serving you in this mission to India, but I wonder if you are still around? Things are so difficult, and I have this thorn in my side, terrible dysentery and malaria. Sometimes I even doubt I saw you raised from the dead. I need your assurance. Any day now I am going to be martyred by my enemies. I need to know you are there to welcome me on the other side."

The good news: Jesus loves us, and he will certainly answer that kind of prayer from one of his disciples/his learners/his students of the faith. Those who pray in that way may know for certain that their Lord is alive. And when the time of death comes they commit themselves into his hands with confidence to die beautifully.

I've been led to talk to many active church goers, who have been "active" all their lives. The conversation goes something like this:

"Are you sure that when you die you will be resurrected into heaven on the other side?" An answer: "Some people say you are snuffed out and that's it. Others believe you will come back in some other form. Frankly I don't know." Or worse, "I'm looking forward to a long rest!"

It wasn't philosophical reasoning that removed Thomas' doubts, or his remembrance of a previous experience, or even the words of the *Gospels*. It was the personal experience of a conversation with the one who loved him, and stood by him in the tough situations of life. So I encouraged all my friends to talk to Jesus who is ever-present and alive for evermore. And I would like to give you a couple of minutes to think on that right now.

Whether you were paying taxes this past Wednesday, or were lucky enough to rate a refund, it's been hard not to see anything but red this past week.

The Declaration of Independence has a phrase that is an indictment of King *George*. Pretend you don't know who it's referring to. The US "Declaration of Independence" declares that its people should not have to deal with meddlesome agencies that "harass our people and eat out their substance."

Big-time billion-dollar bail-outs, trillion-dollar infusions and incentives, quadrillion-dollar deficits . . . all these plots and plans offer some down-the-road pull-the-bootstraps-up kind of help. But they also constantly remind us of how sickly and emaciated our economy is right now. The flow of red ink is causing businesses that have been going strong for generations to shut their doors forever, Lincoln Logs being an almost example.

The trickle-down of all that red ink results in more dreaded "pink slips." A sad short list of "recession proof" jobs included "accountants (needed to keep track of all the losses, audit the books, and pay the taxes), lawyers (needed to orchestrate all

bankruptcies and legal troubles that are on the increase), and clinical psychologists (who benefit from a land-office business in depression!).

If you're not seeing "red," your real name is Rip Van Winkle. Wake up. The frog in the pot has come to a boil. Hope you like frog's legs. It's not just Chicken Little who is wearing a hard-hat from all that's falling from the sky. It almost makes you want someone to put some Valium in the water so that everyone and chill out and just calm down.

During the long, dreary, doom-and-gloom winter of 2008-2009 it seemed that the only way to deal with these tough times was to hunker down and avoid watching CNN. So grab your family, protect your most precious possessions, and circle the wagons against an uncertain, unfathomable future. Let's get practical!

But we cannot hunker-in-the-bunker forever. Spring is finally here and the miracle of Easter reminds us that we live in a post-resurrection world. Disciples of the risen Christ are not supposed to hunch their shoulder and just try to get through the storms. Disciples are supposed to learn how to dance in the rain. When the winds of life are whipping us, Christians fly kites. For Christians are not all that practical when it comes to issues of faith. There is no such thing as a "Christian Survivalist." We are not called to "survive." We are called to thrive as Christians.

As one of our membership shared with me this morning: "This is my God..."

He is the First and Last, the Beginning and the End!
He is the keeper of Creation and the Creator of all!
He is the Architect of the universe and
The Manager of all times.
He always was, He always is, and He always will be...
Unmoved, Unchanged, Undefeated, and never Undone!
He was bruised and brought healing!

**He was pierced and eased pain!
He was persecuted and brought freedom!
He was dead and brought life!
He is risen and brings power!
He reigns and brings Peace!
The world can't understand him,
The armies can't defeat Him,
The schools can't explain Him,
The leaders can't ignore Him.
Herod couldn't kill Him,
The Pharisees couldn't confuse Him, and
The people couldn't hold Him!**

**Nero couldn't crush Him,
Hitler couldn't silence Him,
The Post-Modern Age can't replace Him, and
Ohpra can't explain Him away!
He is light, love, longevity, and Lord.
He is Goodness, Kindness, Gentleness, and God.
He is Holy, Righteous, Mighty, Powerful, and Pure.
His ways are right,
His word is eternal,
His will is unchanging, and
His mind is on me.
He is my Redeemer,
He is my Savior,
He is my Guide, and
He is my Peace passing understanding!
He is my Joy,
He is my Comfort,
He is my Lord, and
He rules my life!
I serve Him because His bond is love,
His burden is light, and
His goal for me is abundant life.
I follow Him because He is the wisdom of the wise,
The power of the powerful,
The Ancient of Days, the Ruler of Rulers,
The Leader of Leaders, the Overseer of the Over-comers, and
The sovereign Lord of all that was and is and is to come.
And if that seems impressive to you, try this for size.
His goal is a relationship with ME!**

He will never leave me,

Never forsake me,
Never mislead me,
Never forget me,
Never overlook me, and
Never cancel my appointment in His appointment book!
When I fall, He lifts me up!
When I fail, He forgives!
When I am weak, He is strong!
When I am lost, He is the way!
When I am afraid, He is my courage!
When I stumble, He steadies me!
When I am hurt, He heals me!
When I am broken, He mends me!
When I am blind, He leads me!
When I am hungry, He feeds me!
When I face trials, He is with me!
When I face persecution, He shields me!
When I face problems, He comforts me!
When I face loss, He provides for me!
When I face Death, He carries me Home!
He is everything for everybody, everywhere,
Every time, and every way.
He is God, He is faithful.
I am His, and He is mine!
My Father in heaven can silence the father of this world.

So, if you're wondering why I feel so secure, understand this...
He said it and that settles it.
God is in control, I am on His side, and
That means all is well with my soul.

Everyday is a blessing for **GOD IS LOVE**

Acknowledgements:

"Sermons.com" illustrations@CLERGY.NET, "Sunday after Easter..."

Doubting Thomas, by Robert Brow

NIV Bible

"This is My God", author unknown