

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 words. If I were to say Judas, many of you would write down the word “betray”, but not all of you.

If I were to mention Simon Peter, some of you would write down the word “faith”, but others would write down “rock”, or “church”. Call out James and John, some of you would write down the phrase Sons of Thunder, but not all of you.

But if I were to mention Thomas, most everyone here would write down the word “doubter”. So closely have we associated Thomas with this word that we’ve coined a phrase to describe him: “Doubting Thomas.”

You may be interested to know that in the first three gospels there is absolutely no mention at all about Thomas. It’s in John’s Gospel that Thomas emerges as a distinct personality, and even then there are only 155 words about him. There’s 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. It was Thomas who said: “Then let us go so that we may die with him”. 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 all the Gospels where the Divinity of Christ is bluntly and unequivocally stated. He confesses: “My Lord, and my God.” It’s the only place where Jesus is called God without qualification, uttered with conviction as if Thomas was simply recognizing a fact. They are not the words of a doubter.

Unfortunately history has remembered him for this scene where the resurrected Christ made an appearance to the disciples in a home in Jerusalem.

Now I can’t help but notice that Thomas has separated himself from the disciples and, in his solitude, missed the resurrection appearance. Is John suggesting that Christ appears most often within the community of believers that we call the church, and that when we separate ourselves from the church we take a chance on missing his unique presence? Perhaps.

But the story doesn’t end here. The second time Jesus made his appearance Thomas was present with the disciples and this time he believed. I notice a few things from this lesson and the life of Thomas.

First of all, I notice that Jesus didn’t blame Thomas for doubting. So often the church’s handling of doubt is to couple it with disbelief and squash it. But Jesus never condemned Thomas. I think he understood that once Thomas worked through his doubts, he would be one of the surest men in all Christendom.

I’m skeptical of people who say that they never have any doubts about faith, people who always appear so sure. Truth is, any person who places himself beyond doubt, places himself above Christ himself. On the cross Jesus cried out, “Father, why have you forsaken me?” At a given time in history, even Jesus had doubts.

You see, authentic faith always begins with intellectual honesty, and doubt is the bedrock of honesty. Put it another way: Faith is not the absence of doubt; it is the overcoming of doubt. We all have doubts; I have had doubts.

I've stood by many a graveside on an icy winter day when a bitter cold wind chapped my face, listening to the cries of a family who has lost someone closer than life itself and way too young, and I've thought silently to myself: Is it all true? Is resurrection reality? Are the scoffers correct? Is it all simply ancient myth designed to get us through the night?

But I'm reminded of what Alfred Lloyd Tennyson said: "There lives more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds." So I find myself crying out, as did the disciple: Lord, I believe. Help me in my unbelief.

Jesus did not blame Thomas from doubting. I also notice that **the most endearing things in life can never be proven**. Jesus said: Thomas, you have believed because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen yet still believe.

I don't know how that makes you feel but it is of great comfort to me. Jesus is talking about me. I will never see Jesus in this life, put my finger in the nail scars; touch his pierced side. Jesus understands that it's harder for me to believe than for Thomas, and he counts me blessed.

If your goal is to know, for sure and by fact, that God is real; for someone to show you a photograph of God, then you'll be forever disappointed. That's what Thomas Jefferson tried to do.

Jefferson is considered to be one of our nations greatest intellects but not many people know that he rejected the notion of miracles. When he read the Bible he could not tolerate those passages which dealt with the supernatural. So he wrote his own bible with only the moral teachings and historical events of Jesus' life.

No supernatural mumbo-jumbo like the virgin birth, the healing of Jairus' daughter, walking on water. And, no resurrection. Here's how his bible ends: "There laid they Jesus and rolled a great stone at the mouth of the sepulcher and departed." For Thomas Jefferson the Gospel ends at the foot of a grave.

Thomas Jefferson is, in essence, calling the disciples liars in that for the next 70 years they propagated the lie that Jesus was resurrected. And what's worse, Jefferson's Bible is robbed of its power. I am convinced that the church could not grow and thrive for 2000 years if the story simply ended inside the walls of a closed dark sepulcher. There is no power in that place. The Church is alive because the stone was rolled away, light broke forth into the darkness, and Christ is resurrected, alive forevermore.

We must leave room in our lives and in our faith for mystery and surprise. That doesn't mean we ignore science or preclude reason. It does mean that the most important things in life will never be conclusively proved. It does mean that, on daily basis, we need to live by faith. Not everything can be proven

Lastly, we must move beyond doubt to faith. It's all right to doubt, but we must move beyond doubt. We can't stay stuck on doubt. We can't use our doubt as an excuse to not study, pray, search, or grow.

Jesus admonished Thomas, "Stop doubting and believe." While unbelief is a normal part of life, it's not healthy to remain in unbelief.

Charles Spurgeon was a Baptist pulpit giant in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Spurgeon writes of going to live in Newcastle England, which at that time was a very dirty industrial town. As he was looking around the house that he was thinking

about renting, the landlord took him to the uppermost room and took him over to a window.

"There", the landlord said as he pointed out the window, "over there you can see Durham Cathedral on a Sunday". "Sunday?" Spurgeon questioned. "Why on a Sunday?" "Because," said the landlord, "on Sunday the furnaces are not working. There's no smoke and you can see farther".

What was true for Spurgeon in Newcastle is true for us today. When we come to worship on Sunday morning we come to see further. When we gather in worship we come to see the heart of God.

There are times in our lives when we face grief, or disappointment, or pain, or depression. There are times in our lives when things happen to us that cause our hold on God to loosen.

When these moments of true, deep doubt come – and they will come – remember this: NEVER DOUBT IN THE DARK, WHAT GOD HAS TOLD YOU IN THE LIGHT.

Because in moments of spiritual light, God shows us true reality. In moments of light, God tells us that He will never desert us. In moments of spiritual light, God shows us that the resurrection is real.

And because of that, we never need to doubt again. Amen.