

Sermon Draft for April 27, 2025

Text: John 20:19–31

Sermon: “No Doubt”

The Second Sunday of Easter always includes Thomas moving from doubt (or unbelief) to firm believer. Indeed, in front of Jesus and the other disciples, he makes one of the strongest confessions of faith in all of the Bible. Unfortunately, the moniker “doubting” has defined Thomas. Elsewhere in John’s Gospel, however, he is portrayed in a much different light.

In the Gospels, Thomas is just listed with the other disciples, usually in the middle of the list. In John, however, we get glimpses into Thomas’s personality by what he says and does. John gives us the key moments in Thomas’s life, starting with the Lazarus account. While Thomas, for some reason, is absent from the Upper Room on Easter evening, when he is otherwise explicitly mentioned he appears to be a disciple who is there for Jesus and the other disciples.

Despite his unbelief during the week leading up to meeting Jesus face to face, he doesn't desert the group but returns the following week and goes fishing with the other disciples. We can all identify with Thomas from time to time.

On February 27, 1991, a few hours before President George Bush announced the end of the Gulf War, Clayton Carpenter stepped on a land mine in the battlefield. He was announced as dead. Three days later the phone rang for his mother. It was her son's voice. She "disbelieved for joy." She said, "It was such a shock. I was afraid somebody was playing with my mind. I asked him questions only he would know the answer to." A short time later two Army officers arrived and assured her that her son was alive.

Similarly on a craggy hill, Jesus was crucified, but three days later the word was announced, "He is alive!" The evidence kept pouring in throughout the day, but it seemed "too good to be true." At the end of the day Jesus personally appeared to the disciples and said, "Peace be with you."

They were afraid. They thought it was a ghost. Then he showed them his battle scars. There was no doubt about it! He was alive! Christ had arisen from the dead!

But wait, there was one person absent, Thomas seems to be a skeptic from the twenty-first century, ***“Unless I see and touch. I will not believe. No way.”*** Doubt comes naturally to the human mind. Mary Magdalene: ***“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb”*** (John 20:2). Peter and John: ***“They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead”*** (John 20:9). All the disciples: ***“They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense”*** (Luke 24:11). Doubt is understandable. Jesus was crucified. Jesus was dead. The centurion made sure of it. Jesus was laid in a tomb, no doubt about it. No one has ever risen from the grave.

Author of On Death and Dying, Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, wrote: “Man has conquered space, he has made great technological advances, but he cannot conquer death.”

But because of the risen Lord we can stomp on the grave and say,
“Where, O death, is your victory? . . . Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57).

Doubt robs people of the joy of “the resurrection of the body.” People today believe in the spirit world and in angels. The disciples ***“were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost”*** (Luke 24:37). Jesus makes clear that his body is a real, glorified, physical body when he asks the disciples to ***“touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have”*** (Lk 24:39). For final proof Jesus eats a piece of broiled fish (Luke 24:43). Obviously a spirit does not consume food. Death is totally defeated with the bodily resurrection of our Lord!

Doubt keeps us locked in our fears. The disciples were locked up with their fears, fearing their own arrest and death. Their hopes were dashed, ***“We had hoped that he was the one”*** (Luke 24:20). As long as they doubted they were miserable and pitiful.

Thomas was steadfast in his doubt and disbelief. Emphatically, double negative, in the original language, ***“I will not, no way, believe”*** (John 20:25). Thus, he robs himself of the joy of the other disciples. ***“The [other] disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord”*** (John 20:20). Thomas must “see and touch.” He must have verifiable, empirical evidence. It is not enough that he has the eyewitness of others.

Jesus addresses our doubts. Jesus appears to Thomas and to us personally. He immediately addresses Thomas. He calls Thomas by name. He has come to remove doubt from the heart of Thomas. He is calling you by name, “Tom . . . Mary . . . Jennifer” . . . whatever your name. He speaks emphatically to Thomas:

“See and touch. Look at my nail marks. Feel them. With these wounds I hung on the cross. With these wounds I suffered for your sins. With these wounds I procured your forgiveness. These nail marks are a sign of my victory over sin and death.”

When Thomas saw Jesus' nail marks, his knees buckled in under him and he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." Doubt had given way to saving faith in Jesus. No doubt about it, Jesus is risen from the grave. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus has "destroyed death." Jesus lived 33 years. He was crucified and died, but he rose and lives forevermore.

Christ's resurrection gives victory on the final day. Now we confess, ***"I believe in the resurrection of the body." Christ rises bodily, strong and victorious over death. As we saw, Jesus' resurrection was not a "spirit" or "ghostly" resurrection. "He showed them his hands and side"*** (v 20). So, our resurrection will be a bodily resurrection.

On February 18, 1546, Martin Luther breathed his last at the age of 62 years. In the midst of his chest pains, he repeated for his comfort again and again, "God so loved the world . . ." (John 3:16), and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

He died with a sense of victory over sin and death. We live and die with that same sense of victory over death.

Today, Jesus through this eyewitness account of Thomas breathes on us his Holy Spirit, that you and I might “keep on believing” that he is the Messiah and that he is the Son of God, that you and I might have “life in his name” (v 31).

Amen