

Sermon

April 22 and 23, 2006

John 20:19-31

We just read about the Apostle Thomas.
What do you know about Thomas?

Do you know what the name Thomas means?

In Aramaic,
it's actually "Tau'ma".

Do you know?
It means "Twin".

Thomas was a twin.

**So maybe we should think of him
as "The Twin Thomas".**

(Which is actually like saying "The Twin Twin.")

Do you remember what Thomas said
in John 11?

Lazarus was dying.

And in fact,

he would die

and Jesus then raised him from the dead.

The disciples were trying to convince Jesus

that it was too dangerous to go to Judea,

where they had tried to stone Jesus to death.

Do you remember what Thomas said?

He said:

"Let us also go,

that we may die with him."

**So maybe we should think of him
as "Courageous Thomas".**

Tradition says that,
after Jesus ascended into heaven,
Thomas spent his life as a missionary.
Although we don't know for sure,
it could be that Thomas was the first Christian missionary
to India.

**So maybe we could call him
"Missionary Thomas".**

But,
if you're like me,
when you think of Thomas,
there's one adjective
that immediately comes to mind.
There is one word we consistently use
to describe this follower of Jesus.

Is that true for you?
What description comes to your mind?

He is DOUBTING THOMAS.

Now,
maybe Thomas would have preferred
going through history known as
Twin Thomas; or
Courageous Thomas, or
Missionary Thomas.

But,
maybe it's most important to you and to me
that he is doubting Thomas.
Because, you know what?
Thomas isn't alone.
He's not the only doubter in the crowd.

And you know what else?
Maybe Thomas helps us to see,
 that doubting is a very real part of faith.
And that gives us hope
 when we doubt.
We know that God doesn't give up on us.
 We know that Jesus comes to us.
 And gives us what we need for faith.

Faith,
 understanding,
 belief
are not simple things.

We just celebrated Easter.
Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.
 The stone was rolled away.
 The angels told her that Jesus was not there.
 She saw Jesus and thought he was the gardener.

Peter and John went to the tomb.
 Jesus was no longer wrapped in his burial linens.
 They were neatly wrapped and lying there.
 They saw the empty tomb.

And yet,
 that evening,
 where were they?
They were locked in a room—
 —afraid.

They obviously didn't get it.
 Questions,
 doubts,
 wondering.
All part of their response.

And ours as well.

When you doubt.

When you wonder.

When you question.

You're not alone.

You don't have to pretend it's easy.

You can be who you are.

Like Thomas.

Doubting Thomas

Did Jesus say to Thomas,

“Because you weren't here last Sunday night,
you're out of luck?

(You snooze, you lose.)”

Hardly.

Did Jesus say to Thomas,

“If you really believed,
you wouldn't have to touch.

So, hands off.”

No.

What did Jesus say?

He said:

“Put your finger here
and see my hands.

Reach out your hand
and put it in my side.

The Greek makes it clear

that Jesus invites him to reach right in–
–thrust his hand in.

Really feel it.

Really touch.

“Do not doubt,

or actually–do not have unbelief (is what the Greek actually says),
but believe.”

Jesus wants us to know the truth.
Jesus wants us to follow.
Jesus wants us to believe.
Jesus is alive and with us.

And he won't abandon us
in our times of doubt.
That's really good news.

But it is different for us
than it was for Thomas.
I don't want to pretend
that it's exactly the same,
because it isn't.

Jesus says to Thomas:
"Have you believed because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen
and yet have come to believe."

Jesus comes to you and to me
in different ways
than he came to Thomas.
But I believe
he still comes to us.
I believe that we don't see him
the same way Thomas saw him.
But we still see him.

Where do we see him?

In Worship.

Bible reading.

Devotional reading.

Times of service.

Following Jesus by showing love–

–in major ways like the Family Walk yesterday

–or more often in little ways,

like doing loving things for your family.

All those things and more

are ways that Jesus comes to you.

We see Jesus

in Worship,

in Word and Sacrament.

Sometimes as we gather,

Christ's presence comes through words:

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

As we say those words,

we are speaking the good news to one another.

In that action,

we are reminded of the reality of the resurrection.

As we gather for worship,

we hear the Word of God spoken and read.

We experience God in the water of Baptism,
in the Bread and Wine of Communion.

Sometimes that Water and Bread and Wine
give us the physical, tangible reassurance we need.

Like Jesus saying:
“Reach out and touch my hands and my side.”

We see Jesus.

Sometimes Jesus comes to us
as we pray.

Mary Ann
is a young mother
who drives her children back and forth
to school every day

And when she is driving,
and has dropped off the children,
or hasn't picked them up yet,
she prays.

(I have a cousin who prays a lot
when she's driving.
One day she got so focused on her prayers,
that she drove off the road.)

For Mary Ann,
often her prayer time is quiet time,
as she shares thoughts and feelings with God,
and doesn't hear a clear response.

But sometimes,
she has a sense of God's presence with her,
right in the middle of an ordinary drive—
—as she prays.

Or we see Jesus in Bible reading.

Steve was waiting for a Doctor's report.
He just hadn't been feeling right.
What was going on with his health?
Was something wrong?
He was afraid.
And as he waited,
he turned to his favorite Bible verses.
And he read them again and again—
hearing God's Word.

For God so loved the world...

Nothing can separate us from God's love.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

God is our refuge and strength.

And remember, I'm with you always, even to the end of the age.

And he remembered Jesus' words:
"Peace be with you."

And in the midst of the fear
and the wondering,
Jesus was there.

Jesus is alive
and Jesus is here now
for you and for me.

John Masfield wrote a little play
called "The Trial of Jesus".
He tells about the Centurion who stood on Calvary
by Jesus' cross.
And it's now time for the Centurion
to make he day's report to Pontius Pilate.

And after he's made his report,
Pilate's wife calls him aside.
She asks him to tell her everything about Jesus' death.
He does.
And when he's finished,
she says to him:
"Do you think he's dead?"

The Centurion pauses a moment,
and then says,
"No, ma'am, I don't."

Pilate's wife asks:
"Where do you think he is?"
And the Centurion replies,
"He is alive and let loose in the world—
—where neither Roman nor Jew can stop his truth."

Jesus is alive
and with us.
With us even now.

Like Thomas,
we'll doubt.
And that's an important part of our faith journeys.

But hear the stories.
Hear the good news.

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.

In Jesus' name,
Amen