

**John 20:19-31** *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."<sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.<sup>25</sup> 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."<sup>26</sup> 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!"<sup>27</sup> 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."<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.<sup>31</sup> 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.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

I think Thomas has gotten a bad rap over the years. Because of one incident—the only one we hear of him specifically in the Bible—he has been labeled “Doubting Thomas” for the rest of time! If anyone were to ask you what you know about Jesus’ disciple, Thomas, you would probably say, “Oh, he’s the one who doubted.” Imagine carrying with you for the rest of your life a nickname you picked up in high school because of a bad or stupid thing that you did. Imagine everyone thinking of that one bad thing every time they hear your name! We do that with Thomas. If we were honest, we might admit we say his name with a bit of condescension, “Doubting Thomas!” We may even scoff as we say it as if we could never imagine finding ourselves in that same position. We’ve stigmatized Thomas to build ourselves up and maybe even puff ourselves up with pride that he doubted and we never have. Yet I think Thomas has gotten a little bit of bad rap. Before we get too sanctimonious about this, let’s look a little closer at this text.

The first thing we notice is that Thomas was not the only one nor even the first one mentioned in this text who doubted. That first Easter night, we find the other 10 disciples doubting just as much. They were full of fear and doubt. They had heard the reports of the ladies who had seen Jesus that morning. Peter and John had been to the tomb and seen the clothes. The disciples had heard the report from the 2 men that walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They had heard firsthand the promises that Jesus made that he would rise from the dead. Yet there they were, locked inside that room that first Easter night with fear reigning in their hearts, not really sure that Jesus was alive. They had not yet seen him alive. The Pharisees had charged them with stealing Jesus’ body from the grave. They feared repercussions and imprisonment because of this. They feared that if the Jewish leaders had treated Jesus the way that they did, they wouldn’t hesitate to treat them that way either. It’s possible there was a little fear in them that Jesus was alive and if so, how he was going to react to them? Their last interactions with Jesus hadn’t been the best. They weren’t able to stay awake with Jesus for 1 hour as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus was arrested, they all fled and abandoned him. One disciple betrayed Jesus. Another denied 3 times even knowing who Jesus was. That first Easter night they didn’t know what to think! They were full of doubts and fears. They needed the evidence of seeing Jesus with their own eyes as much as Thomas did!

In his grace, Jesus appeared before them. The walls and doors could not keep out his resurrected body. It wasn’t a vision of Jesus they saw. It wasn’t a ghost or apparition. It was really him. He showed them the nail holes in his hands and the place where the spear had been shoved into his side to give them the evidence they needed beyond a shadow of a doubt that it really was him and he really was alive! And he brought with him the peace with which he greeted them. He wasn’t there to yell at them for abandoning him. He had given his life to rescue them from their sins. He wanted them to know the peace which he offered between them and their heavenly Father. He wasn’t there to judge or condemn them. He was there to assure them of their spiritual rescue from sin and death and encourage them with the certainty of eternal life which he gave to them through faith. They needed the evidence that Jesus provided and their lives changed that night!

Thomas gets a bad rap because he wasn’t there that night. So he gets singled out from the rest of the group. We don’t know why Thomas wasn’t with the rest of the disciples nor do we know what he was doing. We know only that when the other disciples excitedly told Thomas what they had seen, he replied with his famous answer, “*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.*” The question is: was Thomas a doubter or a skeptic? There is a difference. Was it that he simply wouldn’t believe them and didn’t believe this was even possible or was it that he just needed to see the evidence? Skepticism is defined as: to look at a matter closely, to scrutinize, to study with great care and intimate detail.” It is possible that Thomas wasn’t stubborn in his refusal to believe but just wanted to see the evidence for himself. While Thomas had no right to set any kinds of demands on

Jesus, Jesus in his grace met these demands anyway. To banish all doubt from Thomas as he had the other disciples, Jesus appeared before him and presented all the evidence he needed to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus had really come back from the dead and was a living Savior. Seeing his Savior, Thomas could do nothing but worship him and proclaim: "My Lord and my God!" What doubts he had turned to faith and he worshipped!

My friends, God in his grace had the writers of Scripture write this down as evidence for you and me today. We don't have the luxury of seeing the Lord Jesus by sight. We see Him only through faith. Yet God has provided all the evidence we need. Not only do we have the account of Jesus' resurrection recorded in all the Gospels, but we have all the other miracles and wonders Jesus did. From the changing of water into wine at Cana to the quieting of the storms to the feeding of the 5,000 to the raising of Lazarus from the dead, all of these things were written down to give us the evidence we need beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is true God and was raised from the dead. God wants us to be skeptical - as the definition describes - to scrutinize and study the words of Scripture to know for ourselves who Jesus is and what he has done. He wants us to look at the matter of faith closely, to make sure that we understand correctly and to study his word with great care and intimate detail. This is why you are encouraged to daily Bible reading. This is why your pastors offer many different Bible Studies and encourage you to attend. When we take the time to study the scriptures, we come away with one conclusion: My Lord and My God! God had John and the writers of the Bible record what they did for one purpose: *"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."* This is the end game: believing in Jesus as the Messiah so that we have life in his name. We study the scriptures to know the eternal life that Jesus offers!

Yet, too often in our skepticism, rather than accepting what Jesus offers, we look for him to prove himself in the way that we want. And when that doesn't happen we allow doubt to set in our minds. We look for Jesus to prove himself in windfalls where he showers on us more blessings than we could want or use. We look for him to prove himself and his love for us with earthly success and blessings beyond imagination. One commentator I read state that we yearn for a carnival god, one who dazzles with stunts and slight of hand and uses tricks and potions for quick, amazing cures. We like the God who fills the fish nets. But when these are the places that we look for the evidence of faith, we are often disappointed. Life isn't always about windfalls and great success. There are not always quick cures to the many ailments that we face. When we face a pandemic that threatens life and health, we start to wonder where God is. When businesses shut down and our livelihoods are threatened, fear and doubt about how much God loves us starts to build inside of us. My friends, trust in this god is shaky at best. In our stubborn selfish pride, we set our own standards for God to meet as the proof that he lives and cares for us and when he doesn't meet those expectations we become disappointed and maybe even disillusioned. This separates us from God and causes us to reject the evidence he provides, which means rejecting our salvation as well.

God has provided us with all the evidence we need to have a sure and solid faith. The evidence that Thomas needed gives us one more piece of solid evidence to preserve and sustain our faith. Jesus did rise from the grave. He is our Lord and Savior. God accepted the sacrifice Jesus made for our sins and rescued us from the hell we deserve for our doubts and fears. The doubts and selfish standards we set are forgiven in Jesus. We are saved from the damnation due us and made certain of the promise Jesus made to us: "Because I live, you also will live."

How can we know for sure? Look at the lives these men lived after they saw the resurrected Jesus. Jesus rising from the dead wasn't just theory. It was real. It affected their entire lives! We all know about Thomas's doubting. What many don't know is that this man whom we look down upon for doubting made it all the way to India in carrying out Jesus' mission of proclaiming the resurrected Christ to the world. All of these Apostles died a martyr's death with the exception of John who died in exile on the island of Patmos because of his faith. If this were a made up story kept secret by these men, would all of them to a person have stood so firmly in the face of persecution and death to keep this secret safe or is it possible that at least one of them would have cracked and given up the secret? Yet all of them, to a man, were willing to die for the Jesus they watched die but saw alive again because of their confidence in the life that awaits.

The message of the resurrected Jesus which we celebrated last week as we do every Sunday changed us. It not only changed our eternities, it changes the lives we live right now and right here! Jesus not only brings us the peace of sins forgiven that he alone can offer, but he reminds us of the renewed purpose he has for our lives: to go out into the world with this message of peace through the forgiveness of sins and proclaim it to the world! There are a lot of people living in our world who are full of fear and doubt and who need the evidence of scripture to know the peace Jesus alone brings. They need to know the proof God has provided and God sends us to be his messengers to share this peace with them. Our Easter celebration last week was great. But the effects of Easter do not stop with that one service. Easter affects your life each and every day as you go out-even to the ends of the world-to let others know of the peace and forgiveness God offers them in Jesus.

Unfortunately, Thomas is remembered more for what he did wrong than for what he did right. Let the warning from Thomas's doubt stay with you, but keep before your eyes the changed man who saw with his own eyes the living Lord Jesus. Remember his zeal and passion as he carried out the work of Jesus. Remember his confidence and boldness in the face of death itself as he set out to serve this Jesus to the ends of the earth. Be confident of your faith in the resurrected Jesus and live every day to serve him and carry out his work. He's given to you all the evidence that you need. Amen.