

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 Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 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 it." 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!" 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." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!

Will you allow me to start with a little sass? Today feels like the annual "Let's Rip on Thomas Day." Meanwhile, Mary gets off the hook for being thick; nobody disses the guys on the road to Emmaus for being incredulous; and nobody talks about Peter's sloppy thinking at the tomb. Thomas takes all the heat. And for what? He was just being honest about what he said, felt, and thought.

In sharp contrast, the rest of the disciples were huddled together some place like penguins on an iceberg. There was no belief driving their actions, no conviction, no common Christian bond, nothing like that. There was only fear. Fear was the thing that drove them and the glue that kept them together. Only fear. So before we rip on Thomas, let's give him his due. At least, he had the guts to get out of that house and face up to what he incorrectly thought was his new reality, a dead Lord. (Ok. I'm done with the sass now.)

That's why Thomas misses Jesus' visit. Can you imagine that? A lot of you who are in church this week are every week Christians. Can you imagine if you came back one Sunday and everybody is just buzzing because, "Did you hear Jesus showed up last week?" And you think to yourself, "How's that fair? The one Sunday I miss!" But

that's not how Thomas responded. When he came back to church and the disciples start telling him all giddy and joyful, "We have seen the Lord!" The real Thomas shows up.

And it isn't pretty. He doesn't say, "Really? I want to believe it, but I can't." Nor does he say, "How do you know for sure? Help me believe." Instead, he takes the strongest, most negative stance possible. He says, "I don't want to hear about that broiled fish. I'm tired of hearing about the moved stone. And please don't try to sympathize with me and tell me how you used to think the same way too. There's only one thing that will change my mind. I take that back. There are three things that in combination - they all have to be there - will change my mind about Jesus. #1 I have to see him. #2 I have to touch his nail marks. #3 I have to put my hand in his side." And then he closed with this remark, "Unless those three stipulations are met, I will never ever believe." And I know the NIV only says, "I will not believe." But Thomas doesn't say just that. He doubles the thought. He quite literally says, "I will never ever believe."

And let's all be clear about what Thomas is saying. Thomas is not saying that seeing is believing. To him seeing wasn't enough. In Thomas' mind, seeing could be a mirage or a hallucination. Thomas the scientist had to test the hypothesis of the resurrection with more than one of his five senses. Thomas is saying, "I want to involve not just my eyes in the experience. I want to involve my sense of touch too." In other words, he is saying, "I will not let the reality of the resurrection get into my heart and change my thinking unless it comes to me with exactly the proof that I'm demanding."

What a bitter, confused person! But God still uses him. Thomas is the one guy that we can relate to the best in the post-resurrection accounts. You know why? He's the guy who has to be told about Jesus' resurrection. Just like us. The other 10 apostles were all in the room when the risen Jesus showed up. They touched his hands. They were moved by his spear pierced side. They saw him gobble down that bit of fish. Not Thomas. He missed out on it. He had to be told like us. I'll be honest. During our Easter services, when I read the account from 1 Corinthians 15 where it says that Jesus appeared to more than 500 of the brothers most of whom were still living I thought to myself, "You guys stink!"

It can feel like we've all lost out. Just imagine how *you* would feel if you actually saw the risen Jesus! Just think about what it would be like if *you* touched the nail marks in his hands! Don't you think that that experience would change your life forever? Don't you think that you'd stop allowing yourself those lonely, fearful, and confused thoughts about life? Don't you think that instead of indulging all that worry that you'd kick it to the curb; use some healthy self-talk; and say, "Buddy, you got to see the risen Christ! Stop it already." Don't you think that if you'd been there in that room you'd be so much more joyful and passionate about living for the Lord?

And doesn't that make you feel like saying, "Lord, don't you get it? If you would let me be an eyewitness, then I'd be the same hopeful, joyful, passionate person that those ancient Christians were." And so we tell ourselves that it's God's fault that we're so joyless, so worried, so anxious, and so hurried in life. What is that if it's not Thomas? What is that if it's not bitter? What is that if it's not unbelieving?

I'll tell you this. We don't believe in coincidence, luck, or accidents. We believe in divine providence. We believe that God allows things to happen just so so that his church is blessed and cared for. And we see that in Thomas. God used Thomas' bitter attitude to push him away from the rest of the disciples on Easter evening *so that we can see and relate to Jesus' grace in Thomas' life.*

So, fortunately for Thomas, Jesus saw Thomas' bitter attitude. A week later Jesus showed up in the same spot to the same people to do something about it. 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."** (v. 27) Don't you see how much grace Jesus had for Thomas? For every one of Thomas' demands, Jesus had a command. Thomas had said, "I have to see the nail marks." Jesus said, "See my hands." Thomas had said, "I have to put my finger where the nail was." Jesus said, "Put your finger here." Thomas had said, "I have to put my hand into his side." Jesus said, "Reach out your hand and put it into my side."

Tell me that's not grace for a struggling Thomas. Jesus meets Thomas' bitter, stringent stipulations to knock him out of his Christ-less, fear-filled, death-focused reality. If that tells us anything, it tells us that the risen Christ will go to any lengths to sink the reality of his resurrection into hearts. If Jesus did it for Thomas, he's going to do it for you too. Do you see how he's doing that through John here? This account of Thomas isn't found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Why not? It's John who writes later and is, therefore, writing to a whole generation of people who had not seen the risen Jesus. Not only was it a generation, who had not seen the risen Christ, it was a generation of people who didn't even get to meet a person who was an eyewitness of him. John's writing to us! And so it's John who is telling us that we are not to regret missing out on that eyewitness experience. Actually, we are to embrace it. Listen to this precious quote from Jesus that's about us and for us, **"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."** (v. 29)

Do you see what Jesus is saying in there? He's saying, "It is possible to not see the risen Christ and yet still believe in him. Not only is it possible, you are blessed when it happens." In other words, we're better off for it. I bet you didn't wake up on Easter day saying to yourself, "I sure am happy that I missed the first Easter." But that is exactly what Jesus is saying to us. And I get to tell you one of the top reasons why.

Because we are uniquely positioned to get God; how he comes to us; how he talks to us; how he powerfully and supernaturally works in our hearts. It's not how you might think. We're going to dig it out of John's closing words; **"Jesus did many**

other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.” (v. 30) That’s tantalizing, isn’t it? What might John be talking about? Again, it feels like he’s rubbing it in our faces. “I was there. You weren’t. I got to see all this cool stuff. You didn’t. Nah. Nah. Nah. Nah. Boo. Boo.” Is that what he’s doing? No. That wouldn’t make any sense right after talking about how blessed people are for *not* being eyewitnesses. So, then, what is he doing? The next verse has the answer, **“But these *are written* that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (v. 31)** He’s getting us focused. He’s getting us tuned in. He saying, “Jesus certainly did a lot of cool stuff that I got to see. That’s not important for you right now. You know what is? You know what will make your faith grow like dandelions in spring? You know what will give you hope and joy and confidence in life? You want to experience true transforming power? It’s what *is written* here.

One of the most stunning statements from Jesus on this comes from a story Jesus once told. So this guy was in hell and he said to Abraham who was in heaven, “Please raise a guy from the dead; send him to my brothers’ house; and warn them about how bad it is here. I’m sure they’ll listen if a guy comes back from the dead.” Seems to make sense, doesn’t it? If you eyewitness a mind-bending miracle, then you’ll believe properly, right?” Think again. **“If they don’t listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not become convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” (Luke 16:31)** It’s all about what is written.

I hope you forgive my earlier sass. Today is not the annual, “Let’s Rip on Thomas Day.” Today is officially, “Let’s See Jesus’ Grace in Thomas’ Life Day.” Thomas shows us that Jesus is committed to reaching us with stunning grace and power to see his resurrection into our hearts. That’s why we can be confident Jesus will give modern people access to the same power and the same joy those ancient people accessed. In fact, we are uniquely positioned to understand how and where that power lies. It’s why we’re still blessed even though we missed the event by – oh – a couple thousand years or so. In the Scriptures Jesus has given us modern people access to power just as supernatural, just as powerful, just as transformational, just a joy-producing, just as faith starting, and just as conviction-firming as an eyewitness experience. It’s time to start believing that. In fact, these writings are so incredibly powerful that - to paraphrase a Jesus’ quote - if we don’t believe through them, then we wouldn’t believe even if we saw the resurrected Christ with our own eyes. Or to say it the way John said it, **“These *are written* that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (v. 31)** Amen.