



“Doubting Thomas: My Lord and My God”

Texts: John 20:19-31 and Acts 4:32-35

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I hope you are still in the awe and joy that comes with the good news of the resurrection. It is such an amazing gift that we were given through the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Resurrection of Jesus is a gift that is truly unfathomable. Easter is not just the gift of eternal life for us saved sinners, but it is the gift of life for the church. It is with Jesus' life ending on this earth that the life of the Church now begins. But as with most things in our lives, there had to be growing pains first. There needed to be a time of understanding to come to the disciples of what they had just witnessed. First in the horrifying crucifixion, which surely must have left them traumatized, but then this unimaginable event that occurred with Jesus actually coming back to them. Dead, but alive! Just as he had said.

Can you imagine the seesawing of emotions as they went from grief to confusion to joy all in the matter of days?

And so, it is easy to understand how Thomas, who wasn't there when Jesus appeared to the disciples, had his doubts. After all, he was human and as much as he wanted to believe it, how could what they were saying be real? And, aren't we more like Thomas than we would like to admit? We're told this event of resurrection has occurred, but is it real? After all, Jesus didn't enter the room for us to see the wounds in his hands and side. Yet, this act of Resurrection is what is at the heart of our faith. Can we truly believe in something that is told to us that is so unnatural, so other-worldly? And, perhaps like Thomas, there is a part of us that questions as well. Where are the wounds for us to see and touch? Thomas had his desire fulfilled, but what about us?

Thomas grappled with doubt and the need for tangible proof from Jesus. Thomas wanted the assurance that Jesus had indeed rose from the dead. Because for Thomas, as it should be for us, Jesus placing his body on the cross for the sake of others was the quintessential act that defined him; that defined his life and his ministry. For Thomas, it all came down to that one fundamental issue: Did Jesus rise from the dead?

Jesus chides Thomas for his disbelief, but he doesn't challenge this need within Thomas. So in this scene, Thomas might seem confused and unbelieving, but in the end when he sees and finally understands the truth of what he is seeing, he declares, "My Lord and My God!" My Lord and My GOD!! During the three years of being together, the disciples had declared on many occasions that Jesus was Lord or the Messiah, but never in the three years of ministry together had anyone truly understand the concept that Jesus was, indeed, the Son of God, or more fully, understood and believed that Jesus was One with the Father, One with God. It is here, at this moment, that that becomes real for Thomas. And so, the one known as Doubting Thomas is the one who first declares Jesus as God.

What greater faith is there than to come to the understanding at one's core that Jesus is indeed God, our Savior, our Redeemer, the Giver of all Life? He was the first to have this great clarity about this central aspect of Jesus' story and mission. It was always meant to be more than healing people and affirming people or challenging authority figures on how they treated others. That was all a part of it. But central to everything was the breaking of the bonds of sin and death to give us a new, clean, and eternal life with the God we love and serve. An eternal life with Jesus, the Christ. The One True God. This was the key for Thomas and he needed to know if it was truly real.

And so Thomas believed and the disciples believed. And for fifty days they celebrated the reality of the resurrection until the time of Pentecost. In that time the disciples, thought to have numbered around 5,000, are shaped by the dying and rising of Christ, by the expectation-shattering reality of life victorious over death. And so we move from those early days when Jesus presented himself alive to his disciples to what happens next, which shows us perhaps the most astonishing visible difference Easter made.

What we read about in the passage from Acts could probably be thought of as the Second Greatest Easter Miracle. Of course, Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit would have to be considered up there as perhaps tied with second, but think of the miracle of all these people coming together and sharing and caring for each other. We are told that those who had provided for those who had not. They sold what they had so they could provide for those brothers and sisters who had nothing. What they did cannot be overstated.

Because of Christ's resurrection, the Holy Spirit created a radical community characterized by sacrificial love and giving. The community demonstrated and initiated what God was trying to accomplish in the person and work of the Resurrected One. Those who had much sold or gave what they had so that no one was without. Everyone was housed, was fed, was welcomed. Radical community. Their understanding of what Jesus had been teaching them about loving and living and sacrificing had brought them to this moment and it is in this atmosphere of radical community, of radical love, that the church was born.

There's a movie coming out in July called *Possom Trot*. I don't know if any of you remember this story, but it made an impact on me when I first heard about it. I think it first made national news around 2008. A small rural town in Texas had an amazing pastor, and an even more amazing pastor's wife. She felt the call from God to foster children. Not babies or toddlers, but the older, more traumatized, more abused children. She got her husband onboard and soon he was preaching about the need to take in these children, because that is what God would want them to do. In the end, the town adopted, not just fostered, but adopted 77 children who came with all sorts of issues. This tiny rural town adopted and loved on 77 children who had previously been abused and unloved.

And in many ways we saw that sense of Christian community lived out after Hurricane Katrina when so many families around the country opened their homes and welcomed other families who had become homeless and helped them get back on their feet. One wealthy woman in one of my churches actually went out and bought another home in which to house a family.

Stories like these are the result of the Easter story, of Christ's coming and sacrifice for us. I'd like to think that I could be that altruistic, that generous, that welcoming, offering that Christian sacrifice of creature comfort so others could live in safety and warmth. However, I like my quiet little house and living alone. I've thought about those who can welcome and invite into their homes and lives the stranger; who can foster the raging teen, the bed wetting child who cringes at a touch or a look, who can take the time to volunteer to visit the prison and befriend an inmate who was unjustly imprisoned or who had only known violence growing up. How would you respond to a pastor's call to adopt a troubled child?

As we know from the books following Acts, the radical community of the early church did not last. Many of Paul's letters were to admonish churches, to call them back to the true worship of God, to remind them that power and wealth are not to be our focus; but love and sacrifice is to be how we live our lives.

We went through the Season of Lent reflecting on our sin, on our need for God, on listening to God's instruction on needed correction in our lives. As we go through this Season of Easter, let us reflect and listen for God's instruction on how we can be an Easter Church, a church of sacrificial giving, of sacrificial care, of radical welcome and hospitality. It's not easy to walk outside of our comfortable lives and to see the needs of our sisters and brothers in Christ who are suffering, but that is what we are called to do. To see. To hear. To care. To love. To provide.

Let us remember that we are Easter People. People of the Resurrected Christ. Called to radical love and radical sacrifice. Jesus showed us the way through his life and death and then he came again to show that what he had taught was true. He was the Son of God. Our God. Our God who loved us so much that God gave us the Son, that whosoever would believe in him would have everlasting life. He is the Resurrected One. What Thomas was looking for was shown to him. Jesus' message is true. May we believe and proclaim as Mary did all those years ago, "I have seen the Lord." He lives. Let us with eyes of faith see, believe, and then act. Amen.

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