

Sermon Notes - April 11, 2021
(John 20:19-23)

I want to tell you that the disciple John mentions “Thomas” three times in the gospel of John. The first time he talks about Thomas, the disciple, is in John 11. Jesus has heard that Lazarus, one of his friends, is sick. Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha, and they live in Bethany which is only two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus says, “Lazarus is asleep and I need to go wake him up.” One of the disciples says, “Well, if he’s sleeping, he’s going to be okay. He’s going to be well.” Jesus says, “No, he’s dead and I have to go awaken him.” One of the other disciples says, “Lord, if you go near Jerusalem, the Jews are going to kill you.” Thomas was the only one, John said, who stood up and said, “Let us go with Jesus, too, that we may die with him.” So, you kind of get the impression that Thomas had a strong faith in Jesus; he was willing to die with Jesus.

The next time you hear about him is in John 14. Jesus is trying to prepare the disciples for his impending death. He’s told them that he’s going to be crucified and be raised in three days. They are beginning to grieve their loss of him. Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, would I have told you? I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place, I will come back and receive you unto myself that where I am, you may be also.” Thomas said, “But Lord, we don’t know where you’re going. How can we know the way?”

And then you come to John, Chapter 20 -- it looks as though Thomas is doubting and disillusioned. Have you ever been disillusioned by somebody? Have you ever put your trust in somebody and they hurt you - they let you down? They led you to believe one thing, but you found out it was a different story? Maybe it was a spouse or a pastor or a teacher - maybe it’s a friend, your best friend, or a coworker, but they really let you down. They led you to believe one thing, but it ends up that it is something else. You see, Thomas had believed and trusted Jesus for three years. But he, as well as the other disciples, all thought that Jesus was going to be a conquering king Messiah - overthrow Rome and put the

Israelites back in power – and he, and the other disciples, would have positions of power and wealth. They thought things were going to change. Jesus told them that the world was going to change, but they thought it was going to be by violence, and Jesus was preaching love and peace and forgiveness. They didn't understand the kind of Messiah that he was. So, when Jesus was arrested and they saw the nails in him and saw him die, their dreams were shattered. "What are we supposed to do now? This is our leader. We have no leader! What are we going to do? Did this guy just sell us a bill of goods?" You see, they are disillusioned. All of us have doubts and disillusionments sometimes, don't we? People let us down or it's not the way we thought it was. Sometimes we get that way with God. You know, God doesn't answer our prayers just like we wanted them and in the timetable that we wanted, so we get disillusioned with God, or somebody else leads us one way and it's not that way. We, too, can become disillusioned. We, too, can doubt God. We can doubt others and whether we can trust them again. Thomas was doubting and disillusioned.

I heard an interesting story about Jerry Kramer, who used to play NFL football for the Green Bay Packers. He wrote a book and in one of those books, he talks about facing death. He said, "You know the older I get, the more I talk about death and mortality. I don't know why because I'm in the best health that I've ever been. I haven't had a serious illness in ten years. I haven't broken any bones since I quit playing football. But, my father died a year ago with cancer and I haven't gotten over it. I don't know that I ever will. I think my family has had a harder time than me. But, my father was a religious man and he was ready to go. Sometimes, I wish I had that kind of faith, but I don't. I just have questions."

Sometimes, we need to know that it is okay to have questions and doubts. I like what Dr. Frederick Beetner said. He said, "If you don't have a few questions and doubts, you are probably asleep or kidding yourself," because we ALL have some questions or doubts in faith. And I like his comment: "Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith that keep you awake and moving." We're all going to have doubts sometimes. We're all going to be disillusioned sometimes.

But, I want you to notice something else in our story about Thomas; **he didn't give up on the community of faith.** He hung around that band of brothers; he went back, even after Jesus "let him down."

Jesus knew that Thomas wasn't there the first time he went to the brothers. But, you remember the thing that I have often said - that Jesus not only hears our words, he reads our hearts and our minds? He knew exactly what Thomas had said -- "I'm not going to believe him until I see the nail prints in his hand and I put my hand in his side." And Jesus knew that, and he came looking just for Thomas. **I want you to know that no matter how lost you are, how many questions and doubts you have, God continues to seek you and I out and reveals himself in unique ways to you and me. He never abandons us.** Jesus came back looking for Thomas. He showed him his side and said, "Here, Thomas, reach out your hand and put it in my side." Thomas fell down and said, "My Lord. My God."

You know all of us come to faith in a different and unique ways.

Thomas believed in the resurrected Jesus when he saw and touched him. Some of you, if I ask you how you came to faith, you say, "Well, Miss Peggy, I have just always believed. I've never known any different." Some of you would say, "I had a dramatic experience in my life. It changed my life and I came to faith in Jesus Christ." Some of you would say, "I came to faith at confirmation - or Sunday School - or a revival meeting." But you came to faith in a lot of different ways. That's okay. God continually seeks us out. He never abandons us. Do you remember the parable of the hundred sheep - and it says, "The good shepherd left the 99 to go look for the one that was lost"? God is always going to seek those who are lost or seeking or searching or doubting, because it's his desire that none be lost. God doesn't abandon us. God continues to seek us.

It is easy to get disillusioned. I heard a true story about a Pastor named Dr. Gerald Mann, who used to have a TV ministry in Texas. He would preach on TV, and after his program, he would have a "question and answer time" and people could call in and ask questions. One day, he had a little nine-year-old girl that called in and said, "Dr. Mann, my

question for you is why does God let grown-ups kill children? I go to Sunday School and my teacher told us to pray and God would protect us. I don't understand why God didn't protect my little seven-year-old cousin, Suzanne. She was killed by a grown-up." Can you imagine trying to answer that one on TV? ... That God gives us freedom of will and individual choice, and sometimes we make bad choices.

Sometimes we can get disillusioned, can't we? But there's sometimes that we, as a fellowship of faith, do a good job of helping people to keep them from getting disillusioned. I want to give you an example of that: Dr. Tony Compolo is a Baptist Minister, a book author, and a Professor at Eastern College in Pennsylvania. In one of his books, he tells a story about a Presbyterian Minister friend who was in a small town serving a small church. One week, this young lady who had had a child out of wedlock came to see him. She wanted to know if he would baptize her child. He spent some time visiting with her and her child, and he said, "Yes, I would be glad to baptize your child." They set-up a Sunday for the baptism. That day came, and when they got there, there was no one standing with this woman and her child - no parents, no grandparents, no godparents -- nobody. She was by herself with that child. He went through the whole ceremony of baptism and he got to the point where it said, "Who will support this child? Who will encourage, love, and provide for this child and see that this child grows up in the Christian faith? Who will walk beside this child?" He said that it hit him for the first time - he never asked her if she had anybody to stand with her - and he thought what if the church doesn't stand because they disagree that she had a child out of wedlock? He said, "Lord, please help us today. Please don't let us let down this child and this mother." There was a moment of hesitation, and then all of a sudden, the entire congregation stood up and said, "We will, Pastor. We will walk with her." **Can you imagine how disillusioned that woman would have been if nobody stood up to love and accept her and say, "We pray for you. We're so glad you brought this child to church. We will help you"?** **That's a good thing.**

So, when you have questions and doubts, don't give up on the community of faith, because there are people in that church who will walk alongside

you and accept you, listen to you, pray for you, love you, and encourage you. Know that God doesn't abandon you with your questions, your doubts, or your disillusionment. God is always seeking to reveal himself to you, just like he did to Thomas.

I want you to notice something else in that scripture: Jesus said to Thomas, "Thomas, you believe because you've seen - but blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe." Guess who that falls on? ... Us, because we haven't had the privilege of seeing the nail prints in Jesus' hands and feet, or his pierced side. We have the testimony of eye witnesses; we know the historical facts -- that his resurrected appearance was seen by 500 or more people; we have the scriptures and the testimonies of the eye witnesses and believers; and we have our own experiences. But, it requires a little bit of faith on us to believe and trust, even what we can't see. **Can you believe when you can't see?**

There was a Middle School teacher that was teaching her class about evolution. One day she said, "Everything is formed and God had nothing to do with it. Look out your window, students. Do you see God? Look in this room. Do you see God?" They said, "No." She said, "God had nothing to do with it." She told them that this was the way the earth was formed - and God had nothing to do with it. One young girl at the back of the room raised her hand and said, "Mrs. Smith, just because you can't see it, doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. You could go to the hospital, have brain surgery, and they could look at the different parts of your brain. They could do a scan on your brain and they can tell the brain patterns, the brain waves, but they can't tell one single thought that you had that day. Does that mean that you didn't have any thoughts all day? Just because you can't see it, doesn't mean that it doesn't exist." That's a pretty smart kid, isn't it?

Just because you can't see it, doesn't mean it doesn't exist. God is there for us. He doesn't abandon us when we question him, doubt him, or are disillusioned. But, he doesn't want us to forget about the community of faith that's there to help us go through those times. We're all going to have those times when we get disillusioned and hurt by

somebody in doubt and question. But, God is patient and he's always there.

I want you to notice one other thing: When these disciples were in that room, they were fearful. It says, "They were fearful of the Jews." But, isn't it interesting in the gospel that it says, when Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found it empty and told the disciples that Jesus said he'd meet them in Galilee, that Peter and John ran to look in the tomb. Now, if they were so afraid of the Jews, wouldn't they have been hesitant to go out? So, maybe they were fearful of the Jews, but I also wonder if they were concerned about how Jesus would respond to them. If he's really resurrected, is he going to be mad at them -- disappointed? Is he going to be revengeful - shame them? ... But, he doesn't. He didn't say one time in that lesson, "I told you so. I told you'd I'd resurrect. Don't you believe me?" He didn't shame them; he didn't guilt them; he didn't seek revenge. He said, "Peace. Greetings, my friends." He welcomed them with love and acceptance and peace - and that's what God does with us, no matter what we've done. He receives us with love and grace - and he wants the very best for us - even when we question and doubt him. He doesn't abandon us and he's always seeking us out.

I pray that we will learn to deal with our questions and doubts that we'll walk along somebody else when they've been disillusioned -- that we'll pray for them, listen to them, not put them down, and help them. Sometimes all we can do with the questions is to live them into answers. Sometimes, we may never get the answer because we are not God -- we're just human beings. I pray that we will grow in our faith and that we'll deal with our doubts and help others when they are disillusioned. And I pray that we will be that community of faith needed when others question and doubt. We need each other and we need God. May God help us. Amen.