



Pastor Gwen's Message
2nd Sunday of Easter
"Doubting Thomas Sunday"
Sunday, April 16, 2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Christ has risen. . . . He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

You aren't shouting that as you did just a week ago on Easter Sunday. Well, that could be why today is often times called "Low Sunday". Maybe low in attendance or low in enthusiasm. Another name for this Sunday after Easter is "Doubting Thomas Sunday." Think with me for a few minutes about whether or not Thomas deserves such a bad rap? And is it a bad thing to doubt?

Those of you who do crossword puzzles have probably seen the clue, "doubter" for a 6-letter word. It is Thomas of course. The name "doubting Thomas" will forever haunt his memory because he would not take the other disciples' word, that they had seen the risen Christ.

I remember one year at St Olaf when I had done a children's message on this Sunday following Easter and I asked the children who came forward what comes to mind, when I say the name Thomas. One little girl was so proud she knew the answer and said "Train". Guess it has been a while since I had thought of Thomas the Train, a kindergarten reading staple. Trains and doubts aside, let's look at who Thomas, the disciple was. Maybe we can

dissolve the stereotype that has followed him for centuries. But wonder if we can do that without first seeing ourselves in “doubting Thomas.”

Thomas was one of the twelve disciples listed in Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s Gospel. He is also listed once in the book of Acts. However, in John’s Gospel, Thomas is named 5 times, the most familiar is the discourse we heard this morning.

So, here we are on the eve of the night that Mary Magdalene first saw the tomb of Jesus empty. The disciples are fearful for their own safety, and they are locked in the Upper Room where they had shared the Passover with Jesus, just days before. And Jesus appears saying, “Peace be with you”. The 10 disciples see the nail scarred hands of Jesus and the place where the spear had pierced his side, but Thomas was not there. We have no information as to where he was. Possibly, he was hiding elsewhere. Perhaps, he was so despondent over Jesus’ death that he went away to be alone. Or maybe he just went home to work now that his leader was gone. But when he finally shows up, the others tell that they had seen Jesus in person, in the flesh, right in this very upper room.

Well, Thomas does not believe these men. He tells them that he will have to see Jesus in person to believe. And ever since then, Thomas has been dubbed “Doubting Thomas”. Personally, I think it is a bad name. Thomas was a model disciple. Even though he said he would not believe until he saw Jesus for himself, I do not think that he at all doubted the resurrection of Jesus. I just think that his doubt was centered on the other disciples. It was their testimony that he was not sure about, not that his Lord could not be raised from the dead. That he would have no trouble believing.

Less than a week before, Thomas had more than proven his loyalty to Jesus. He was the disciple that stood with Jesus while the others tried to convince Jesus that he should not return to Bethany to see Lazarus, who was ill. The others were fearful for Jesus’ life, but Thomas was willing to go with Jesus. He did not waver in his faith, even in the cite of possible violence.

Thomas knew that Jesus was the Promised Messiah and that the kingdom of God was at hand. He was not fearful of sacrificing his own life, if necessary, to help Jesus complete his mission. Thomas had enormous faith and I think he

just wanted to be treated like the remaining disciples. He wanted to see for himself what they had seen that Jesus was alive.

And are we so different. We all want to be treated fairly. We all want to see for ourselves when something happens or is presented to us. I don't know about you, but I am truly very much a visual learner. I like to see things firsthand for myself. So, I desire to have my own faith. A faith that has encounters of my own. And I think that is probably true for most of us. We don't want to ride on the coat tails of our parent's faith, but rather have our own faith that comes to know Jesus, the living Christ and to have a relationship with him of our own.

Well, I think that is all that Thomas wanted as well. He wanted a faith and experience all his own with his Lord and Savior. Yes, Thomas doubted the other disciples, but who is to say that doubting cannot enrich our relationship with God.

I don't believe that any of us want to be spoon fed religion in a way that we are just expected to march in line to someone else's drum, never questioning why we believe what we believe. I want to ask questions and I want to look to Scripture for answers. I think we should openly debate issues of our society today in light of our faith and what Scripture tells us. After all, this is how we come to an understanding of what God has planned for our lives. God is way bigger than my doubts and I trust that he will send me answers to my questions that relieve my fears and doubts. God loves us so much that he can overcome all our idiosyncrasies, our impudence, our immaturity, and our questioning faith.

And so, I find that Thomas is a guy I can like, I guy I can relate too. He had the courage to stand apart from the other disciples. Thomas shows us that it is OK to be honest about what we don't quite understand and to want to see for ourselves.

And the Good News is that Jesus did come back to the Upper Room a week later. He came this time for Thomas. To give him the same opportunity the other 10 disciples had the week before, to see Jesus alive and in person. Thomas saw that Jesus was raised from the dead as he confessed, "My Lord and my God".

If in fact Thomas has a fault, it is that he wants to be treated like everyone else. He wanted to see Jesus in person. Wouldn't that be nice if we could do that as

well to calm our doubts. Our doubts are hidden deep within us and would certainly be squelched with an appearance of Jesus in the upper room of our hearts. And folks, the Holy Spirit makes that happen for each one of us. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to the Scriptures so we too could have the knowledge of God's great grace. So truly, God knew way ahead of time that we needed that Advocate. He knew that we would have doubt. God wants us to be honest with our doubts instead of trying to pretend we don't have doubt. He does not just want shallow faith and love for Him. He wants us to wrestle with our faith. He knows that is what makes faith stronger. He knows that is the only way we can open ourselves to let the Holy Spirit work within us.

I am glad that Thomas doubted the other disciples and stood up for us with his two feet firmly planted on the ground and challenged Jesus to come to Him. And God came to Thomas as he comes to us. God loves us so much that he comes looking for even one lost sheep. He will come looking for each one of us when we too are having a Low Sunday. God keeps his promises and even our doubts do not change that. Jesus came to live and die for us only to rise again so that we can know that God loves us so much there is a place in heaven for each one of us. There is no need for the Thomas in all of us to doubt that promise. Thanks be to God. AMEN