

Who is Thomas?

In John's gospel today, we're going to read the story of Thomas. After Jesus died, the disciples probably felt a lot of things: confusion, sadness, fear, and more. When we find them today, they are hiding, because they are afraid they will be killed like Jesus. They had heard that Jesus had come alive again, but let's be honest: that's a pretty tough thing to believe. Could it be true? What would you need to know that your friend who was dead is now alive?

Let's read from the book of John Chapter 20: verses 24-31.

Read: *John 20:24-31*

Here we are-approx. 8 days after the resurrection and Jesus is still doing his Ta-Da moments to prove he is the one. Our guy of the day is Thomas (the twin or by his more well known name- Doubting Thomas)

We all have heard about "Doubting Thomas before. The guy that has caught grief for 2000 years and my guess is that he will catch grief for the next 2000 years – or until the Lord returns.

Thomas was one of the people who was closest to Jesus, and that he spent about three years living with him, witnessing his miracles, and hearing his teachings. He saw numerous demonstrations of Jesus' power—including his power to raise people from the dead—and he heard Jesus predict his resurrection, but he still didn't believe Jesus was resurrected until he saw for himself.

So with this background knowledge, we all realize that "Doubting Thomas" is a nickname, but did you know that Thomas itself is a nickname? "Thomas" comes from the Aramaic word for twin. The gospels give us a Greek name for Thomas. That name is "Didymus" which is also a nickname and means "twin." We don't have any idea whose twin Thomas was, but I would venture to say that they weren't both called "twin." That would be too confusing. "Hi, my name is Twin and this is my twin brother Twin." I don't think so

So why don't the authors of the Gospel refer to Thomas by his real name? But what is Thomas' real name? His given name was Judas. At least that is the tradition within the early Syriac Church. Now is where it really gets weird.

There were two disciples named Judas – Judas Iscariot –we know what he did and **Judas Thomas** or rather – **Doubting Thomas**”

His name is simply synonymous with doubt. All you have to do is pick up a Webster’s Dictionary and there it is. Actually, it is in two places: under “d” for doubt and under “t” for Thomas. According to Webster the definition for a “doubting Thomas” is a habitually skeptic person. I don’t think Thomas was a Habitual doubter. The only time – we see his doubtful skeptical side is in this story. So, I think ‘habitual might be overstating the case just a little bit.

I think that Thomas gets a bad rap. Whenever someone mentions Thomas, they don’t just say “Thomas”, they always gotta say “Doubting Thomas” as if there were a bunch of people named Thomas in the Bible and it is necessary to say “Doubting” to get the right one. I have a news flash for you. Doubting Thomas - (one of the twelve), is the only Thomas in the Bible. There is no official Christian recognized book of or Gospel of Thomas in the bible. This Thomas is enough! People also act as if this is the only passage that mentions Thomas – he was mentioned quite a few times. But this story in the book of John is the only one that people seem to remember; This is where Thomas is the main character.

He had some of the best sayings and questions. Like when the other disciples tried to keep Jesus from going to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead because of the danger from those in the area who had just earlier tried to stone Him (John 11:8), Thomas said to them, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (John 11:16). That was the first time he was even mentioned in the bible. Thomas also asked Him one of the most famous questions. John 14:5-6 says, "Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

Even though Thomas earned a negative label, he was not lacking in some very good qualities. He displayed great courage and loyalty.

Our tradition has singled him out as having an inferior faith because he actually expressed his doubt in the resurrection. He made his reservations known out-loud. And because of that he has the dubious distinction of being the poster child for skepticism.

Remember others doubted also. The disciples didn't believe Jesus had risen from the dead either until they, like Thomas, saw Jesus and His scars on His hands and side. And keep in mind he is hearing about the resurrection second hand. The other disciples had the advantage of seeing Jesus in person 8 days prior. So, for Thomas, not having had the encounter with the risen Lord, this tale being spun by the delirious disciples is a bit unbelievable. Even for us who have the benefit of knowing the end of the story, this seems unreal. I mean it is not every day that we hear about folks rising from the dead. In fact, I think I would go out on a limb and say that it is a fairly rare event. So, Thomas, having heard the news that the disciples saw Jesus alive, was understandable skeptical. Thomas comes across as the pure skeptic. He knows these people well. He would gladly entrust any of the disciples with his life. Still, he can't imagine that what they are saying is true. They must have hallucinated or something.

That's why I think it's not fair that Thomas is known throughout history as "Doubting Thomas"—because, you see, he was not any worse than the others—or us.

How did Jesus restore this doubting disciple's faith?—He met his exact need. Remember that in verse 25, Thomas made it clear that he WOULD NOT believe unless he saw the print of the nails in Jesus' hands, and put his finger into those scars and thrust his hand into Jesus' side. What did Jesus tell Thomas to do? You know.

Doubting Thomas had doubts, and expressed them, but refused to doubt any longer when he saw Jesus. Thomas could have still said, "No, I don't believe it" but he didn't. He took a look at the evidence and believed it. Any of us can do the same thing.

He had a moment of doubt, but who doesn't? Some people think doubt is the opposite of faith, but maybe doubt is just a normal part of discipleship and following Jesus. Everybody has doubts; faith means we just do our best to work through them.

The moral of this story to me is: If you have doubts like Thomas did, keep doing the best you know right where you are. Stay faithful. Keep trusting, following, serving, and praying - Especially in this time of global pandemic. Just like in this story of Doubting Thomas, God will reveal himself to you when you have doubts.

He will show you the nail prints. We have evidence of this in the Word of God, about the Son of God, and if we follow up on it, we too can say like Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

We all look forward to the time we can meet again in person. Open your eyes, hands, and hearts to see where Jesus is standing among us. May the Holy Spirit both comfort and challenge you in the days ahead.

Stay safe and as I say **"Stay Shawnee Presbyterian Strong"**