

Title: Doubting Thomas, Faithful Thomas  
Date: 4/24/2022 (Easter 2, Year C)  
Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church  
Service: 10am Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)  
Readings: [Acts 5:27-32](#); [Revelation 1:4-8](#); [John 20:19-31](#); [Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24](#)  
Video Link: [https://youtu.be/I\\_yEF2Ui9P8?t=1181](https://youtu.be/I_yEF2Ui9P8?t=1181)

The same stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.  
This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.  
On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it.  
(Ps 118 22-24)  
Amen.

Happy Second Sunday of Easter!

Every year on Easter Day, we have the option to read the account of the resurrection found in the gospel according to John, or the account found in the gospel we are assigned to read that church year. This year we read the account from Luke. So, the Easter Day readings can change from year to year. But on the Sunday after the resurrection, we always, always, read THIS passage from the gospel of John.

Right after the joy of the resurrection, we hear that the disciples have locked themselves in a house for fear of the Judean leaders.

Right after the joy of the resurrection, we hear about Thomas. Thomas, the apostle who drew a line in the sand. Thomas, the apostle who didn't just ask for proof, but demanded it.

When the other disciples told him about their encounter with the risen Christ, he said, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my fingers in the mark of his nails and my hands in his side, I will not believe" (Jn 21:25). It sounds like an ultimatum. "Jesus, show me proof or I walk."

Because we hear this story year after year, it's tempting to think of Thomas as "the one who doubted." Even people unfamiliar with the Bible may still know the term "Doubting Thomas." But is it right to hang this nickname on him? Glancing through the gospel according to John, we find two other instances in which Thomas had a speaking part.

Scene One: By the Jordan River. A few days after he receive the news that Lazarus had fallen ill, Jesus decided to return to Judea. In response, the disciples tried to talk him out of it. There had already been one attempt to stone him, and it was likely the authorities were going to try to arrest him if he showed up at Bethany.

As everyone else tried to persuade Jesus to stay away, Thomas was the one who told the rest of them, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (Jn 11:16).

This is a man who was willing to die for Jesus, a man who rallied other people to follow Jesus wherever he may go, no matter the consequences.

Scene two: The Last Supper. After Jesus spoke of preparing a place for them in his Father's house, it was Thomas who asked, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (Jn 14:5). It is because he asked that we have Jesus' response, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6).

This is a man who deeply desired to know Jesus. He had spent three years with him, listening to his teachings and watching his works of healing. As he watched Jesus being crucified, die, and then buried, a part of him died, too. When he lost Jesus, he didn't just lose his way; he felt he'd lost THE way.

This is the kind of loss that makes you question the past. You wonder whether anything you accepted as truth was actually true.

This is the kind of loss that makes you question the future. All of a sudden, you aren't sure whether you have spent all those years building your life on solid rock or sinking sand (Mt 7:24-27).<sup>1</sup>

This is the kind of loss that shakes you to your core.

It doesn't surprise me that Thomas wasn't with the other disciples that first week. I imagine it was too hard for him to be around anyone that reminded him of Jesus.

Then word got back to him that Jesus had appeared to his fellow disciples. They were huddled together in this house and had locked the doors out of fear. Yet, Jesus came and stood among them and told them, "Peace be with you." He showed them his hands and his side, marked by the nails of the crucifixion and the spear used to verify he was dead. Only then did these disciples rejoice.

When Thomas heard their story, he doubted not because he had a history of unbelief. He doubted not because he had not seen the power and authority of Jesus, he doubted because he had seen too much. He had seen this promise, and it had been snatched from him.

His passionate declaration "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my fingers in the mark of his nails and my hands in his side, I will not believe" (Jn 21:25) came from a deep, fervent desire to believe. He was the last person who would want to, pardon the expression, poke holes in their story. But he was very clear on what he needed in order to believe again.

There is a lot of talk about the reasons people don't come to church. I don't think it's because they don't want to believe, or that they think faith has no place in their life. I think it's because they want to believe but don't want to be let down, and they want to be assured that there is room for both their faith and their doubts.

In middle school, I was part of a church youth group. I loved the fellowship and the promise that God could answer my questions whenever I opened the Bible. But by the time I reached high school, I had a hard time reconciling the God of love they talked about so much with the God who would condemn my parents to hell simply because they were not Christian. This felt inconsistent. They didn't like that I was volunteering with a Buddhist organization. This felt narrow-minded. So, I left.

I spent more than a decade walking back and forth on that spectrum between Christian and spiritual but not religious. I still prayed, I still found churches to be beautiful, and I still loved sunrise Easter services. But, I also watched the news. When I saw the values those Christians stood for and the people they stood against, I wasn't sure their God was the kind of God I believed in, the kind of God I wanted to believe in.

The Executive Council of The Episcopal Church met this week, in advance of General Convention this summer. Think of the executive council as the vestry of The Episcopal Church, and the General Convention like our annual meeting where we talk about where we are as a church and where we want to go.

To kick off the meeting, our presiding bishop, Michael Curry, shared the results of a poll his office had commissioned.<sup>2</sup> The poll reported that Christians thought the traits of Christians were “giving,” “compassionate,” “loving” and “respectful” and that non-Christians saw the traits of Christians as “hypocritical,” “judgmental,” “self-righteous” and “arrogant.”<sup>3</sup>

The reason that people aren't coming to church isn't because they can't put their fingers in the mark of Jesus' nails and their hands in his side. They aren't coming to church because they can't see Jesus in the body of Christ, in his church. If they see the way of Jesus as hateful instead of loving, restrictive instead of liberating, and death-dealing instead of life-giving, why would they show up?

In the collect for the second Sunday of Easter, we prayed that we might “show forth in our lives what we profess by our faith.”<sup>4</sup>

We don't tell the story of Thomas to discourage people from asking questions about the resurrection. We tell the story of Thomas to remind ourselves that questioning isn't the same as tearing down. Questions can also help build up because it reminds us to identify and reinforce the beliefs that are important to us, the beliefs that are essential. For example, those poll results give us cause to take a good look at what we stand for and who we stand with and how we're speaking up (or not) so that it is clear to everyone, inside the church and out, that we seek to embody the loving, liberating, and life-giving way of Jesus.

So, as we go through these fifty days of Easter, let us contemplate how Thomas, doubting AND faithful, can be the cornerstone of our Easter practice.

Amen.

