

Life Like Thomas

What do you think about the image Kara found and included in the bulletin? It's entitled "The Incredulity of Saint Thomas." (Incredulity being another word for disbelief.) In this painting, which dates from the year 1602, the Risen Christ, on the left, is holding Thomas' hand and guiding his index finger into the spear wound on Jesus' side. As if Christ is saying to him, "You wanted to touch the wound in my side? Here it is; touch it! Don't be shy!"

Because of John 20:25, Thomas the disciple will forever be known as "Doubting Thomas." And he will forever be the unofficial "patron saint" of those of us who have ever had doubts in our faith. Anyone want to fess up? I'm lucky enough to even share a name with him.

What do we really know about Thomas the Apostle? He is named in all four gospels as one of Jesus' original twelve disciples (right up there with Peter and James and Andrew). But the Gospel of John reveals a bit more about him. In John 11:16 we find this: "**Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'**" That says something about his courage and commitment, don't you think? A bit fatalistic and pessimistic, perhaps. But not afraid to die, right alongside Jesus. And at the least, he must have really loved the man.

In John 14:5, we find this (this is when Jesus was in the Upper Room with his disciples, the night of his arrest): Jesus had mysteriously said to them, "**And you know the way to the place where I am going.**" And then Thomas replied, "**Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?**" Clearly there's a logical, rational side to him; even, dare I say, literal. He could only process what Jesus had just said at face value. "The place where I am going" could only mean a literal place. Metaphorical language eluded him. But Thomas is also honest. Honest about what he knows, and honest about what he doesn't know. He's not afraid to admit it. And there's something about the way he asked his question "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" It was almost like a plea. He wanted to know more. He wanted to understand what Jesus was saying to them. Almost as if Thomas was frustrated that he didn't understand.

And that brings us to **chapter 20, verse 24**. Where we are reminded that he was also called Didymus, which means "twin" in Greek. (The name Thomas itself means twin in Aramaic.) Which makes us wonder, did he have a twin? If so, were they a lot alike? Many twins are. But they can also be different and unique. Just like Logan and Mason are different and unique. (Have you guys ever wondered which of the disciples each of you are most like? That might be fun!)

Thomas so badly wanted to believe what the other disciples were telling him, that they had really truly seen the Lord after he had been crucified. But his intellectual integrity wouldn't allow him to believe. At least, not this. People don't just rise from the dead. Especially not the way Jesus had died. There's only one way Thomas would and could believe what they were telling him. He had to see Jesus for himself. Wounds and all. He had to have verification; he had to have proof. (Today we would say, scientific proof.)

I said last week as one of my sermon take-aways that Jesus does indeed "come and stand among" us, like he did the disciples [**show last week's image of Jesus with the disciples**]. Did I mean that literally? Has anyone ever seen that man [point to picture] standing or sitting here in

this sanctuary? Of course not. But might it be true metaphorically? Mightn't there be other ways the spirit of Jesus could appear to us than as a human being who looks like that? Not for Thomas. It's either literally true, or it's not true at all.

Fast forward another week. [**John 20:26**] This time the disciples are all in that same house. Including Thomas. And John's narration is like a mirror image of the previous week: "Although the doors were shut [same verb that was translated "locked" the previous week] Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Do you remember that bombshell greeting from last week? That he had to say twice to get them to understand? Here he says it a third time.

And then Jesus turns to Thomas. Specifically Thomas. And Jesus essentially says to him "Here I am. I'm here for you." What he really said was [**20:27**] "**Put your finger here and see my hands. Rouch out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.**"

And something seemed to click for Thomas. Suddenly he saw it, like the sun coming out from behind a cloud that had hovered above him his whole life. Truth doesn't have to be literal. Truth can also be metaphorical. Talk about a bombshell!

If that's a bombshell, what comes out of Thomas' mouth next is more like a thermonuclear explosion [**20:28**]. "**My Lord and my God.**" Wait, did Thomas just say that? The most complete and unflinching confession of faith in the entire Gospel of John?

If I can be autobiographical for a moment, this is how I came to faith. I was just like Thomas. Stubborn, exacting, literal. Jesus didn't really rise from the dead. That was just a story. A fairy tale. It couldn't be "True."

But very gradually, Jesus kept coming to me. Metaphorically, not literally. In full color, not just in black and white [**bulletin picture**]. And today I can say, with Thomas, unequivocally and freely, that Jesus is "my Lord and my God." He's here for me. He came for me.

Tradition says that Thomas eventually ended up in India. That's right, that foreign, far-away country of India, beyond even the Roman empire. Tradition says he shared the gospel there. That's right, the good news of the Resurrected Christ. (In fact, today Thomas is known as the official patron saint of India. Here's another painting of him I found.) [**new picture**] Tradition also says he was eventually martyred there, put to death for his faith. Sounds to me like the very same person who had once said "Let us also go, that we may die with him." The same strong-willed courage. Except this time there was no fatalism or pessimism whatsoever. It had finally all made sense for him. But then, that's what Jesus does.

As for John the gospel writer, he says in verse 30 [**20:30-31**], where he sums up and seems to conclude his gospel, that there were a whole lot more stories he could have written about, a whole lot more metaphorical truths, that sooner or later would have exploded into our lives like thermonuclear explosions. So many stories that he couldn't possibly write them all down. Don't you wish he had? We can't help but wonder, what other signs did Jesus do? What other miracles did he perform? What other bombshells did he drop?

But he wrote down the ones he did in the hopes that we too might come to believe in him, and that through believing we might **have life in his name**. That's what it all comes down to. Believing, and then "having life in [Jesus'] name." What do you think? Did he mean that literally, or metaphorically?

On the other hand, does it really matter? Because our take-away for this week is, we too can have a life like Thomas. Honest. Inquiring. Courageous. Committed.

Amen.