

IT'S PERSONAL: MY SAVIOR, MY STORY, MY FRIENDS

MY DOUBTS ARE PERSONAL

John 20:19-31

OPENING REMARKS *keep these moving...*

- Encourage everyone to follow the instructions on the sermon insert... there are follow-up questions to use in your quiet time this week... check in via FB, welcome guests one more time... explain that in this series PR, Darrell, and I are going to take turns sharing messages.
- Praise God for wonderful Easter services – for 70+ volunteers in Worship and Music and Hospitality Ministries that made it possible for us to have Maundy Thursday services, the Good Friday Way of the Cross event, and for 625 people to worship with us on Easter morning!
- REVIEW: Last week, we talked about Our God being personal. We're made in God's image and as such love and personal relationship are woven into our very nature. We need to meet people where they're at... that refers to not just understanding where they are mindset-wise, but sometimes it means we gotta get outta here to meet others where they are. And if we don't possess a living, personal relationship with Jesus Christ ourselves, how are we going to be able to expect others to sense Him when we reach out?

INTRODUCTION

Question: What makes you doubt the veracity (truthfulness) of a statement or a person?

- If I were to say, "The sky is pink!" would you believe me? But do you notice that we often have pink clouds at sunset? For instance, this past Wednesday we had a beautiful pink sunset. The sky is pink! Once in a while... This should keep you on your toes for the rest of this message, right? Someone I met a few months ago said, "There better be some perk that comes along with all the pollution we have in our air!"
- You know this joke... this is bipartisan, now... How can you tell when a politician is lying? The lips are moving. Yes...
- Here is a picture of a working man in jeans... notice the dirt all over his jeans. If you appreciate the ruggedness of the working man and you want to identify with him but don't really want to get your hands dirty, you can still go to Nordstrom's and buy a pair of jeans with beautiful synthetic dirt for only \$425! It's a steal!

Today we are going to look at our doubts, using the story of Jesus and Thomas, who we often call ...*doubting*... Thomas. Our Scripture was expertly read for us a moment ago, so let's pray and then we will talk about what was read and a little bit about what it means to us as individuals because after all, *it's personal*. [offer a brief prayer]

JESUS REVEALED HIMSELF PERSONALLY.

I want to begin by noting that Jesus says the same thing in verses 19, 21, and 26. What does He say? **Peace** be with you.

In everyone's favorite part of the story, when Jesus was born we hear the angel choirs singing "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth!" This is that same kind of peace.

A. Jesus came to bring peace.

It is expressed as **shalom** in the Old Testament and carries with it ideas of tranquility and harmony. Shalom is pictured perfectly in the Garden of Eden: Adam was given work to do, Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony, and they walked with God in the cool of the day. Shalom, peace, complete acceptance, perfect understanding, and life lived in the presence of God.

In the New Testament this peace is also expressed as being **reconciled to God**, and that truly was Christ's mission: He came to reconcile us to God (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

If we know Christ then we can know His peace – peace, He said, not as the world gives... but deep, lasting, everlasting peace (John 14:27). It is a peace that expresses itself in **confidence**. It comes from knowing that God sent His Son Jesus Christ to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

B. Jesus came in spite of fear.

But all these things that we know about Christ and His peace come to us from the witness and teachings of these men who were now huddled together in fear.

Picture yourself as one of the disciples at that first Sunday night meeting after Jesus died. It was probably the first time most of them had the courage to slink out of their hiding places to try to find each other. Peter and John, of course, had already been to the tomb. They heard the excited shrieks and screams of the women who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body but instead saw angels who proclaimed His resurrection! They ran to the tomb themselves and saw that Jesus' body was not there, and yet the linen He was wrapped in was still there. John believed right away, but Peter may have still been processing what he had seen. There was confusion, a lack of unity, perhaps even a little arguing going on ... except for John, they knew nothing for sure except that they had nothing to do with the disappearance of Jesus' body.

They also knew that they were wanted, hunted people. The Roman soldiers could raid the place at any moment and the Temple leaders... they would join with the Roman government in wanting to silence them. They would be accused of moving and hiding His body but they had no idea where He was moved to or hidden. Could it be that He really was alive, as the women claimed?

Security was as tight as four fisherman and a tax collector could make it. After they got there they barricaded the doors and made as little noise as they could, considering most of them were loud Galileans. Was this really how it was going to end? Would the thug soldiers move in on them as they grieved the loss of their newly infamous and now dead leader? They met together in fear, and yet in spite of their fear Christ appeared.

He appeared and **He showed them His wounds**. The marks that He bore for our salvation were still present in His body because it **really was His body!!!** There were the nail prints from the spikes that were driven into His hands. And after He gave up His spirit on the cross and died, the Roman soldiers certified His death by – instead of breaking His legs as they did anyone who was still alive on a cross – driving a spear into His side and blood and water flowed, another sign of His actual DEATH. He did not just lose consciousness as some claim today. He actually died. These wounds weren't

stage makeup. They weren't synthetic wounds from off a rack in Nordstrom's. This is the real deal, believers! Behold His hands and side!

And His body hadn't been moved or hidden away! He was RISEN! And He was standing there among them in victory over death!

And then as the reality of this amazing victory begins to break through their thick skulls, Jesus Christ breathes the Holy Spirit on them and then He gives them power to forgive sins. The results of an encounter with Jesus are PEACE, and POWER, and look at the disciples response: when they saw the Lord they were OVERJOYED. They had joy!

An important aside: How do you suppose that joy may have been expressed? When people express joy in worship – such as clapping, applauding, saying Amen, and even doing other things, do we fuel their joy by celebrating with them or do we shut it down with raised eyebrows or scowls or knowing glances at one another? “Well that’s not church appropriate!” How would an outsider know? Let’s seek to expand people’s joy, not squelch it.

An encounter with Jesus brings PEACE, POWER, and JOY. Peace: knowing that I belong to God; Power: knowing that He is letting me live, love, and witness in His power; and Joy: Spirit-filled praise in the presence of Jesus, and all this is in spite of my circumstances.

When they walked out of that meeting with the risen Lord that night they were still hunted and wanted but it didn't matter! They had seen the Lord and they knew He was alive! All Eleven of them: Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew, the other James, Simon the Zealot, Thaddaeus... [count again] Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, Simon Z, Thad... “OH NO BROTHERS!” Somebody said, “Guess who’s NOT HERE?”

THOMAS!!!!

“Thomas is not gonna believe this...”

THOMAS DOUBTED HIS FRIENDS' TESTIMONY

Thomas as a person

A few fun facts about Thomas... first of all, Thomas's name wasn't really Thomas, but that's what we English-speaking people call him. His Jewish name had three letters... the equivalents of our letters D, M, and S. You could buy vowels in Hebrew but they were expressed in little dots and dashes under the consonants and sometimes could be ambiguous. His name could have been Dumas but was probably Domas, and because “D”s were pronounced kind of drily and with the flat part of the top of the tongue, King James's boys thought it would be fun to translate “Domas” as “Thomas” and there you have it.

In Greek his name – again derived from the Hebrew letters for D,M, and S was “Didymus” which means “twin” – but we don't know if he had a twin or not. In almost all of the listings of the disciples, he seems to be paired with Matthew, just like Peter and Andrew and James and John get paired, but who knows? This is how denominations are made, so let's just leave it right here.

Indications of Thomas' record

Domas, like all the other disciples, was personally invited by Jesus to follow Him. There are two other times that he is mentioned, both here in the Gospel of John. He has a fun quote in John 11:16... An unsuccessful attempt on Jesus' life was made in Judea when religious leaders tried to rile up a crowd to stone Jesus to death. God delivered Him from that unscathed, but the disciples were shaken up nonetheless. Then Jesus' cousin Lazarus got sick and died. In what region of Israel did Lazarus live? You guessed it. So, Jesus announced to the disciples that they were going to go back to see Mary and Martha – and Lazarus. Needless to say, there was no small discussion about the wisdom of returning to the area where people were anxious to see Jesus dead. But Thomas says, "Come on guys, let's go!" Now I wish that was all he said right there. But it wasn't – and that to me is the entertaining part. A lot of times when we read the Scriptures, we read in stoic Shakespearean tones that portray very little emotion and we attribute divine thoughts to these guys who – except for Jesus of course – were only human. And so we often read these words to be words of courage (read formally), "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

But having lived through the teenage years with two of my children, I'm inclined to argue that there is perhaps another equally valid way to read his remarks, "Come on let's go... [read sarcastically] so we can die with Him..." Maybe that's too much for you, but now consider the second time he's mentioned... at the night of His betrayal.

Jesus is in the Upper Room with His disciples. He has just washed their feet, and now He is preparing to break the bread with them. He realized what was coming. He was moved with sorrow and compassion for His disciples, and spoke into them words of courage and hope,

"Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

This is a beautiful sacred moment that is enshrined for us in the pages of Scripture. It's almost like poetry. And in the midst of this beautiful, mystical moment... yeah, here comes Thomas. His head is about to explode,

"Lord, WHERE ARE YOU GOING? WE HAVE NO IDEA! AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN WE KNOW THE WAY???"

And you know, if Thomas hadn't blurted out his honest skepticism at that moment, we may never have had Jesus' response, a response that has brought clarity to nonbelievers and comfort to believers ever since: I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME.

THOMAS' JOURNEY TO BELIEF

So when Thomas hears his friends say "We have seen the Lord!" You can perhaps imagine his reaction. In his natural skepticism and his grief, he refused to believe based on his crazy friends' stories. "Unless I see the wounds and put my fingers in the nailprint in His hand and put my hand in the wound in His side, I WILL NOT BELIEVE!"

Thomas Voiced His Doubt.

God doesn't want you to swallow your questions! Jesus doesn't want you to hide your doubt! Whatever you have going on in your heart and mind is no surprise to Him anyway! Bring it to Him!

Sometimes we tell ourselves that there's no room for doubt in faith, that somehow asking questions of God means that we lack devotion and love for Him. But the Scriptures have several stories of prominent doubters:

- Sarah, at 80, heard God say that she would bear a son. She had never before given birth to a child. She laughed.
- Moses doubted that he was really the man God wanted to speak for Him before Pharaoh.
- King David doubted that the power of God was sufficient to defeat his enemies and ordered a census of the soldiers, something that God told David not to do.
- Zechariah doubted that the angel told him the truth when he said that Zechariah and Elizabeth were going to give birth to John the Baptist.

God dealt with their expressions of doubt in different ways. But God was never threatened by doubt. Your belief or disbelief doesn't change God... it doesn't diminish the Father, it doesn't dethrone the Son, and it won't discredit the Holy Spirit! God is God and His Word is truth!

A. In spite of his doubt, Thomas stayed around Christ-followers and his Christ-following friends stayed with him!
(20:26)

Are you tempted to give up on believing in Jesus? Thomas was, but he stayed around people with stronger faith than he had. Are you tempted to give up on your doubting friend? How do you think the other ten disciples felt when Thomas announced that he wouldn't believe them?

The world around us leaves little room for grace and change and repentance. The Gospel of Christ is *all about* grace and change and repentance. Don't throw out a doubter who is willing to discover truth, and if you're a doubter, refuse the temptation to run away and find other doubters. Hang out with people who are assured of their faith.

They were together again AND THOMAS WAS WITH THEM.

Jesus Revealed Himself to Thomas

Here Jesus comes again, "Peace be with you!" He says to all the men, and then He turned to Thomas... and He uses all the words that Thomas used, except Thomas used them as a refusal, and Jesus uses Thomas's words as words of invitation... (John 20:27)

"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe!"

Thomas Had a Personal Response.

WHEN JESUS REVEALS HIMSELF, HE REMOVES ALL DOUBT!

This was undeniably the Lord. His body. His voice. His wounds. His eyes. Jesus revealed Himself to Thomas. He was flooded with peace and power and joy and he made this stunning proclamation:

My Lord AND MY GOD!

Thomas had called Him Lord for a while – it's a little more reverent than saying "Boss", but it means essentially the same thing. But to say Jesus was God, for Thomas and the other disciples, that was even deeper faith. Perhaps this reflects some other doubts that Thomas struggled with that aren't mentioned here, but one thing is for sure: THOMAS PROCLAIMING JESUS AS GOD INDICATED THAT THOMAS WAS NOW FULLY CONVINCED. HIS DOUBTS SATISFIED, HE NOW HAD NO RESERVATIONS ABOUT WHO JESUS WAS! Whatever doubts he held onto about his future, his life, this movement he signed on to, whatever doubts he had, we now melting away in the presence of Jesus.

Tradition tells us that when he was forced out of Jerusalem he spread the teachings and faith of Christ far and wide, planting churches in Syria and making it as far as India with the Gospel. There he gave up his life for his Lord and God.

THOMAS' STORY AND YOUR STORY

An encounter with Christ brings peace, power, and joy. Jesus commended Thomas for his belief but then added a blessing for all who would believe in Christ without seeing Him. And that's where our story can begin.

As many of you know, I asked a question on my Facebook page this week: what is the opposite of doubt? Lots of people replied, and some folks shared some very helpful insights that helped shape this message. I was prepared to say that peace is the opposite of doubt. After all, peace is what Jesus came to give. Nobody who answered my question said, "peace," but they did use related words such as assurance, certainty, hope. And many of you said the opposite of doubt is faith, belief, and trust. Mention Darin's response: it's a continuum not a matter of opposites. Just as Thomas journeyed from doubt to peace so everyone who doubts has the same opportunity. Trust and belief are how we move from doubt to peace... so... I am happy to announce that everyone who commented on that question this week was right. And if you recognized some of your other comments in my comments this morning, thank you.

What doubts and fears do you have to bring to Jesus? See, it's when I let doubt control me that I try to control things and people around me – relationships, events, finances... It's only when we voice our doubts, stick with those who have faith, and open ourselves up to Christ Jesus through His Word and prayer and waiting on Him that we will find that He can then remove all doubt as He brings His peace, proclaims His power in our lives, and floods our souls with His joy as He reveals Himself in our lives.

Whether you are a fellow believer in Christ who struggles with doubt, or you have never trusted in Christ as your Savior, please know that this is my prayer for you today: that Jesus will reveal Himself to you, and that you too, with Thomas will be able to say, "My Lord, and my God!"

***Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now,
you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,
for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.***

1 PETER 1:8-9

CREDITS: As I referenced my FB page question, I need to give some important credit to the people who commented. It was very interesting to see their comments and those who gave me more than one word to think about really helped me consider what I was discovering in my own study and prayer over this message. Heather Voss and Fred Cremer had some great thoughts. And I quoted directly or indirectly from comments that Darin Wiel, Cisco Cotto, and Ross Wiseman made. On a personal note, my Kindergarten teacher was the first person to mention "assurance". I guess I'm not THAT old if my Kindergarten teacher is alive and a Facebook friend! "LOL"

Andrew's Facebook: What's the Opposite of Doubt?

