

I speak to you in the name of our Creator, the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Poor Thomas! He has carried an unjust name for almost two thousand years. Despite being called Thomas Didymus three times in the Gospel of John, he has most often been called Doubting Thomas, especially on this Sunday. By the way, just because it's fun, "Thomas" comes from Aramaic (t'oma) meaning twin, and "Didymus" is the Greek word meaning twin. So, when the Gospel of John says "Thomas, called the Twin," it is, in effect, saying "Twin, the Twin." Anyway, back to "Doubting Thomas". This moniker is so closely associated with doubt and cynicism, it is used as a slur for those who are dubious and skeptical. I would like to correct, or at least nuance this understanding of Thomas this morning.

To get a better understanding of Thomas it's important to see where else he shows up in the Gospel of John. We meet him first in the Galilee where Jesus has a thriving ministry of healing and preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. Jesus receives word from his friends, Mary and Martha in Bethany, a small town in Judea, just outside of Jerusalem, that their brother Lazarus is very sick and his sisters want Jesus to come heal him. The disciples are a little freaked out because they know that are some officials who would like to kill Jesus. Jesus says he is going anyway. And Thomas replies, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." He doesn't try to talk Jesus out of it, he is fully committed, even if it means dying with him. So, Faithful Thomas.

The next time we hear from Thomas is at the last supper. This is part of what is called the farewell discourse where John gives us the content of their conversation during the last supper. It is a long conversation. It takes 5 chapters and

155 verses! Over and over Jesus tells them that he is leaving and going to his father. He starts with “Where I am going, you cannot come” (John 13:33), and “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now” (John 13:36). The disciples are confused and understandably upset. Later in the conversation Jesus shifts to “I go to prepare a place for you, and you know the way” (John 14:2–4) Thomas speaks up again and says, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Thomas wants to be sure they have all the details. He doesn’t want to get the directions wrong. After, there is a lot at stake here. So Careful Thomas. Jesus responds not with directions, or a map, but the statement, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Brian McLaren challenges the way this is often read, as exclusive and proprietary. He has a much more expansive reading. Jesus is not offering a formula for salvation, but a loving assurance. I think it helps to ask the questions: What is the way of Jesus? What is the truth of Jesus? What is the life of Jesus? We find those answers in the gospels and the message, ministry, and life of Jesus. The way of Jesus is to love your neighbour as yourself, to even love your enemy. The truth of Jesus is that in him we see the very heart of God—full of grace, truth, and steadfast love. The life of Jesus is abundant life for all, especially for the marginalized and oppressed. I’m so grateful Thomas asked one question, and Jesus gave the answer to another one!

Then, it’s just a few days later. Thomas has the great misfortune to be out getting food or something when Jesus appears to his followers in the Upper Room on the same day he has risen from the dead. At this point in John’s telling of the story, only Mary Magdalene has seen Jesus, and of the disciples only Peter and John have seen the empty tomb. They are afraid and confused. Jesus suddenly appears in this locked room, which I’m sure only increased their fear, which is why

Jesus said to them, “Peace be with you.” This is another way of saying, “do not be afraid.” Then what does he do? He shows them his hands and his side! They don’t have to ask. Jesus knows that they need this assurance of who he is. Again, he says, “Peace be with you” and then breathes his Holy Spirit into them! And as much as I would love to stop here for a bit, this amazing statement will have to wait until the Day of Pentecost, because we have some ground to cover yet with Thomas.

It doesn’t sound like Jesus hung around for supper or anything, because He was gone by the time Thomas got back. The other disciples excitedly told him, “We have seen the Lord!” Poor Thomas, he must have been devastated! The one who was willing to die with Jesus, the one who so desperately wanted to know how to find him after Jesus left them, has missed the visit! Of course he wants what the other disciples experienced! He wants to see Jesus and to touch him. Not for nothing but it is important to note that in Luke’s account of the Upper Room appearance, **all** the disciples are doubtful. All of them.

A week later, not later the same evening, not the next day, but a full week later, Jesus returns. I would like to know where he was and what he was doing in that week! I’m pretty sure Thomas was convinced that he had missed his opportunity to see Jesus. Can you imagine his grief and sorrow? Yet Jesus does appear again, and again inside their locked doors. And again, he says “peace be with you.” Jesus knows they still need reassurance. He also knows what Thomas needs, to see and touch him just as the other disciples had done. Jesus says to him, “Do not doubt but believe.” The Greek has this beautiful lyrical cadence to it: ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός (apistos alla pistos). But I don’t think it means do not have doubts, although admittedly that’s an easy surface reading.

According to Paul Tillich, “doubt isn’t the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith.”¹ Rather than suppress our doubts, we should explore them and allow them to set us on a journey of discovery and a deepening of our beliefs and relationship with God. When I first began questioning what I read in the Bible, I was worried that my faith and relationship with God were in trouble. My pastor at the time reassured me. He said, I don’t think God is worried about you or your questions. I think God loves that you are grappling with him. I can’t tell you how much that meant to me then and the 40 years since! I also heard or read along the way that the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. So don’t be afraid of your doubts or questions! Engage them! Use them as a call to go deeper and wider. When we stop fearing our questions and instead allow them to drive us toward an authentic encounter, we arrive at a place where faith is no longer blind assumption, but a hard-won conviction. Nowhere is this more powerfully illustrated than in this story of Thomas. Having refused to accept second-hand testimony and having insisted on touching the wounds of the risen Lord, his journey through doubt culminates not in a whisper of belief, but in a thunderous confession.

Thomas responds to Jesus “My Lord and my God!” This is the clearest and most explicit declaration of Jesus’ full divinity spoken by a disciple. This statement is unique because Thomas directly addresses Jesus, he uses “God” without qualification, and it comes after the resurrection, when seeing and believing converge. Many scholars see this as the climactic confession of the Gospel, echoing the opening: “the Word was God.” This is the moment where everything the Gospel has been revealing is spoken aloud by a disciple. Thomas becomes not the

¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (University of Chicago Press), pp. 116–117

last to believe, but the one who speaks what the whole Gospel has been waiting to say. He says it after absence, after grief, after doubt, after reaching toward wounded flesh. So the highest confession in John doesn't come from certainty at the start—but from encounter at the place of wounds. Often attributed to Henri Nouwen is this statement which addresses the fear of having doubts, “Have the courage to trust that you will not fall into an abyss of nothingness, but into the embrace of a God whose love can heal all your wounds.”

And how beautiful is that? Jesus' request to Thomas is deeply intimate. He invites Thomas to touch his still-unhealed wounds—those same places marked by nails and spear. This reminds us that wounds are woven into the divine narrative.

By sharing his wounds, Jesus reveals that our wounds are places for God's healing presence and love. This theology offers hope to the wounded, those still recovering, and even those not yet ready to heal. The risen Christ welcomes the doubting, uncertain, and grieving to experience his reality and nearness. He, having endured abandonment, denial, betrayal, and crucifixion, does not conceal his wounds but offers them for us to see and touch. Malcom Guite has written a beautiful poem for Thomas.

“We do not know... how can we know the way?”

Courageous master of the awkward question,
You spoke the words the others dared not say
And cut through their evasion and abstraction.
Oh doubting Thomas, father of my faith,
You put your finger on the nub of things
We cannot love some disembodied wraith,

But flesh and blood must be our king of kings.
Your teaching is to touch, embrace, anoint,
Feel after Him and find Him in the flesh.
Because He loved your awkward counter-point
The Word has heard and granted you your wish.
Oh place my hands with yours, help me divine
The wounded God whose wounds are healing mine.²

Some have seen and believed, others have not seen and still believed. At the center of both experiences is God-in-flesh, loving us in our own wounded places. May you let those wounds be healed.

² From <<https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2012/07/02/a-sonnet-for-st-thomas-the-apostle/>>