

2 Easter Year C April 27 2025

John 20:19-31

Thomas's story is told every Sunday after Easter. He is both annoying and valuable at the same time. He is the kind person in my life who refuses to be agreeable and questions everything. He is the two-year-old who asks, "Why" and will not stop asking why even when I have provided a good explanation. However, Thomas is not a two-year-old child, by a full-grown adult, who seems to take personal delight and pleasure in being difficult and even smug while driving me nuts. Thomas becomes an expert and everyone else, including me, are viewed as incompetent fools. Thomas is the perfect podcaster where nobody can provide an answer that he is satisfied like hearing. He is so skilled in pointing out every flaw, real or imagined, in what others are saying and can sound superior in doing it. Thomas makes experts look like idiots and idiots looking like experts.

Nevertheless, people like Thomas have an important role in my life. At some point during the endless debates, arguments, and all attempts to persuade the eternal skeptic that life is not all that bad, I realize that it is I am the unrated one. As I read once, "Don't argue with an idiot. They will bring you down to their level of intelligence and beat you with their experience." I reach a point where the best course of action is to walk away to keep my own peace of mind. It is the unyielding skeptic who teaches me what is really important, my own judgement and peace of mind.

Jesus did an amazing thing. He rose from the dead. What is even more amazing is that he took that power over death and returned to his friends and said, "Peace be with you. My Peace I leave with you." There was no hostility, no disappointment, no words of lament or betrayal. Jesus sought to heal, even when he suffered death. This encounter changed his followers from fear from others to joy toward God. Yet not everyone was on board. One of Jesus' friends was not convinced that what the others saw was real. He needed proof and he demanded it, and his friends could not provide the faith that he needed to believe.

Thomas didn't walk away from his friends in his moment of questioning. He hung in there with them. There had to be something that held Thomas's attention for another week. **AND** Thomas's friends didn't reject him and excluded him from their fellowship for questioning their experience with the risen Christ. There was room to disagree and still strength to hold on to the unfolding promise of the resurrection of Jesus. The Passover of death was no longer reserved for a group

of people but was made available for all of humanity and was not limited to a point in history. This promise is too big for anyone to hold to themselves, and it was offered to everyone, including those who doubt the strongest.

Let us consider what, Assistant Professor of the Practice of Ministry at Phillips Theological Seminary, Nancy Pittman has to say about Thomas.

**(quote)** Here is the real problem with Thomas. In rejecting the disciples' good news about what they have seen, he rebuffs the very friends with whom he has shared life for so long. In fact, throughout John's Gospel, and in the Johannine Epistles that grow out of it, love and trust within the faithful community are significant expression of the work of Christ in their midst. Yet Thomas's words, especially in the Greek, carry a powerful sting; "there is no way I will believe unless I see it myself" is the original force. Thomas abrogates (or evades) the work of Christ in their midst through his proud words of doubt. THEIR eyes and THEIR fingers are not enough for him; he must see and touch FOR HIMSELF. Thus, the community that Jesus has tried so hard to build throughout the Gospel is threatened from the beginning by Thomas's skepticism.

(This line of thinking says) "If you cannot prove it to me with evidence that I can verify myself on my own, I refuse to accept the truth you are presenting here." These skeptics say dismissively to those in our midst who speak a different truth. They echo Thomas when they say these things, refusing to believe something that might force them to reexamine their comfortable preconceptions or do things that might upset others.

It is Thomas's community-shattering doubt that the Gospel of John rejects. For at some point, if our churches are to be faithful to the risen Christ, we must stop distrusting our friends in Christ. At the very least, we must stop questioning motives, doubting dedication, and thinking the worst of our companions when they state a different opinion or offer a contradictory version. We must learn to believe not simply in the goodness of the Lord, but in the goodness of one another - even when they deliver the strangest news, "We have seen the Lord."

**(end of quote)**

People are skilled in challenging other people's motives without having a clear understanding of their own. When I hear, "You know why that person is doing and saying what they are saying" and then they offer their opinion. My response in my head is, "I really don't know the reasons people do what they do, after all I don't always know why I do what I do."

I read about how a man was in a middle of a sales presentation and when it came to his division the chart showed his sales trending down. At that point

people in the room looked over at the sales manager and he was clearly not happy. He stood up in his chair, grabbed a piece of paper and wrote a note in a hostile fashion. During the break a couple of his friends approached him and said, "You looked upset about the report." He replied, "What?" His friends continued, "When your sales division sales numbers were being presented you looked angry and made notes." To everyone's surprise he said, "Oh. I was angry at myself because I forgot for the third time that I was to get ice cream for my kids. I kept forgetting and I needed to make a note. The sales presentation didn't bother me at all."

Today we live in a world that is zero sum driven. The commonly held focus is on disagreement. This is an all or nothing approach when it comes to agreements and understandings. Agree in totality or be rejected in the strongest measure. There is no middle ground. When I hear about this, I grow sad because this kind of thinking leads to further division rather than unity.

The Easter promise is not about death and disagreements. Jesus is about restoring what has been broken. Jesus' message is about forgiveness and mercy. Jesus didn't approach his disciples after he rose from the dead demanding that they get out there and act bold. Jesus didn't scold them for being afraid and scared of what others would do to them for following him. Jesus gave his disciples the ability to forgive others and if they were not willing to forgive others, they wouldn't live a fuller life with Christ. Jesus pointed out that holding on to past grievances limits the person from being more alive in Christ.

The church is a place where it can hold other people's doubts long enough for them to find their faith. I believe St. Mark's is a place that provides space for the sacred for those who question the holy long enough for them to encounter this joy and hope for themselves. What this does is turn distrust, doubt, and loss into holy moments and opportunity of life-giving gain.

Thomas's questions are not about disconnection by skepticism and doubt, but an invitation to be reconciled and connected to joy and purpose. Right now, I am watching and praying for people who are experiencing intense physical pain. Both of them are isolated by this pain. However, one person uses anger and disappointment to remain isolated in their attempt to reduce the emotional and spiritual toil on their lives. The other person is using this pain as an invitation to reach out and trying to connect with others as their way to reduce the emotional and spiritual toil they are experiencing. In my opinion, isolation leads to death, and connection leads to life.

We all are given a choice. We can continue to distrust other people and question motives for our self-serving purposes. This self-serving attitude will reinforce a disconnected life and the division among our-selves will only continue to grow. **OR** we can choose to trust so that we can connect with God and one another. I choose trust. Sure, I know it will take time for my trust and hope to be realized, but if we don't choose to trust we will be guaranteed we will not find joy, hope, and to live an unfulfilled life.

What do we need to find our faith so that we can become alive? What kinds of demands do we now place on God and hope that others will help us find Jesus in our greatest moments of need? How does a Thomas's skeptical attitude lead to life rather than death?

Easter season is about seeing the world in a new way, the way that God already sees us.

I was talking to a friend about a person who was irritating me. My friend said, "Let's think about this for a moment. You are everything that person wants to be but isn't. That person is angry and has found something to disagree with you as to bring you down a peg." I responded, "Yes, and it is working." My friend replied, "I think what is missing is that person doesn't feel valued and honored. So, have a conversation with that person. Do your best to make them comfortable and valued." This is the gift of faith and being in a relationship with others. My friend saw clearly what I was missing. It was connection that is about life and not focused on death. This kind of connection can overcome disagreements for it does not seek to consume but bring alive our deepest hopes and joy in Christ. Not everyone will want that kind of connection for they want to retain their own anger and self-righteousness, but we love them anyway for this is how the kingdom of God works.

The Thomas's in our world are not people to avoid. They have an important role in helping others deepen their faith in Christ. They question because they want to know that God is real and that they need a reason to believe it is possible for Jesus to approach them and give them courage to believe.

Here is the thing, we too can be Thomas's from time to time. We need a community to be there to pick us up in our doubtful moments. We need others to remind us that Jesus is alive and that we have seen the risen Lord.

We also need time for our minds to catch up with our hearts. While we wait, we need friends to wait with. We need the church. This is how we bring Jesus' love for the world alive for ourselves and for others.