

## **“From Doubt to Faith” – Apr. 7, 2024**

### **John 20:24-29**

*24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”*

*26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”*

*(NRSVUE)*

A long time ago, I was sitting in San Thome Church in Madras, now called Chennai, in India. The church is also called St. Thomas Cathedral Basilica and the National Shrine of Saint Thomas. Madras is known as the city where St. Thomas was martyred. After sitting in the pew for a while, I followed the posted directions to go downstairs, where the relics of St. Thomas are enshrined.

As I continued to backpack through India, I decided to go to the Indian state of Kerala, too. Why? Most Christians in India believe that the Apostle Thomas reached the city of Muziris in Kerala in 52 AD. Kerala is located along the southwestern shoreline of India, and Muziris was a port there. When 16th-century European priests came to southern India for missionary work, they were told by Christians there that a famous Christian missionary, Thomas, baptized their forefathers in the first century.<sup>1</sup> On Sunday morning, I had an opportunity to worship in one of the churches in Kerala. They were so hospitable to me. After worship, some of the church members explained that there were so many churches bearing St. Thomas’s name in Kerala. They proudly said that many people also adopted St. Thomas as their business names, pointing to several places around the church: “That’s St Thomas Grocery Market. That’s St. Thomas Dental Clinic. That’s St. Thomas Bakery....” They loved St. Thomas!

I love St. Thomas, too. He is one of my favorites among the twelve disciples of Jesus. He has often been called ‘doubting Thomas,’ and I think that’s unfair. His name is mentioned one time each in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, when they

---

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas’s visit to India has been neither proved nor disproved by historians. Several 3rd and 4th-century eminent Christian leaders, including Ambrose of Milan and Ephrem the Syrian, wrote about Thomas’s missionary work in India. Britannica; Smithsonian; Time; Bible Dictionary; etc.

introduce the names of the twelve disciples of Jesus (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15).

In the Gospel of John, we have more pictures of what Thomas was like. In John 11, Thomas alone appears to be a person of courage. When Jesus planned to go back to Judea to heal Lazarus, the disciples said to him: “Rabbi, the Jews were trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” Thomas was the only one who encouraged the other disciples to follow Jesus into a hostile Judea, saying, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” (John 11:7-16)

Thomas didn’t hesitate, either, to ask when he had a question to Jesus. When Jesus said, “You know the way to the place where I am going,” Thomas asked, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Thanks to Thomas, we can hear one of the essential sayings of Jesus: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” (John 14:1-7)

And we see Thomas again in today’s reading from John 20. A week ago, when Jesus appeared in front of the other disciples, Thomas was not there. When he heard from the other disciples that they saw the risen Christ, Thomas didn’t believe it. He said, “Unless I see and touch him, I will not believe.” A week later, Jesus came again and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then, he invited Thomas to see and touch the nail marks in his hands and the wound on his side.

Jesus said, “Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him: “My Lord and my God!” This is the most powerful confession of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Thomas saw God fully revealed in the risen Christ.

Jesus said to him again, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” For some, it sounds like Jesus was scolding Thomas. However, if you read the Bible carefully, the other disciples didn’t believe the announcement of the Resurrection of Jesus, either. Only when Jesus appeared to them and showed his hands and sides (John 20:19-20) did they recognize the risen Christ and rejoice. Except that Thomas met Jesus a week later, the reactions of Thomas and the other disciples were almost the same.

It was not the end of the story. Thomas was one of the small groups of disciples who had a breakfast with the risen Jesus at the Sea of Galilee (John 21). Thomas was also one of those gathered in the Upper Room and was transformed by the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:13; 2:1-4). Thomas

and the other disciples were strengthened and equipped with the resurrection hope and life in and through the risen Christ.

Therefore, although Thomas is often called “doubting Thomas,” it would be more relevant to call him “Thomas the believer.” As it turns out, Thomas was an amazing witness to the risen Christ. That’s part of what I was thinking and feeling about Thomas when I was sitting in that San Thome Church’s pew in Madras, India. I honor St. Thomas, who courageously proclaimed the Good News in India and was martyred, showing that God’s love is stronger than death.

The story of Thomas in the Gospel of John resonated with the second-generation faith community “who had not seen and yet had come to believe.” They were Christian believers who were under persecution, but still bearing unceasing witness to the risen Christ. Although they often had to meet in homes secretly, they courageously proclaimed the Good News by the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Their stories of why they were bearing witness to the risen Christ even under the threats of death became a powerful reminder and encouragement to those who believed without seeing the Lord.

Today’s reading refreshes the blessing upon all of us who have not seen but still believe. We are also invited to ask ourselves: Why and how did I come to faith? Why do we share our faith? The risen Christ has been breathing on us, empowering us with the Holy Spirit. As Jesus invited Thomas to move from doubt to faith, Jesus continues to call us to believe in God’s renewing and recreating grace and power revealed in the risen Christ.

From Doubt to Faith. That’s what God also calls us to be mindful of this morning. We haven’t seen the risen Christ in person, but as a body of Christ, we have seen the Lord in our life together. The risen Christ has been breathing on us. The Spirit of God has been actively and powerfully moving and working in and through us individually and collectively. We are the living body of Christ who are called to grow and be equipped as a healthy, disciple-making congregation. God continues to melt us, mold us, fill us, and use us to become a living witness to the risen Christ in Sagamore Beach and beyond. Shall we say yes to this imperative call?

May God continue to bless and empower us in the light of the Resurrection power and hope! Amen!