

**LSBC Sermon      April 19, 2020      Charlie Fuller**  
**Text: John 20:19-31**  
**Title: *Redeeming Thomas***

They gathered together in secret. After all, the Romans had executed their leader. Their *own* religious leaders had conspired to have it done. The crowds that earlier had cheered their arrival five days later screamed for the blood of their leader. You didn't know whom you could trust. So, what were once crowds of Jesus followers had now dwindled to just this small group. Meeting in the dark. In near silence. Their very lives were in danger.

They had met the week before. Well, except for Thomas. Thomas had to do his laundry. Or maybe was finishing up some binge watching. We don't know. But Thomas had missed seeing Jesus walk through the wall and *show* them that he was still alive.

When they told Thomas what had happened, he was pretty blunt. "I'll believe after I feel the blood from his wounds on my finger."

And thus, Thomas got his nickname: "Doubting Thomas."

It's a part of the English lexicon. Doubting Thomas. People who've never cracked open a Bible have heard that name and know what exactly what it means.

The phrase "Doubting Thomas" has its own Wikipedia page. The term is defined as "a skeptic who refuses to believe without direct personal experience."

The term is typically used in derision. It's a put-down. An insult. "Oh, you're such a Doubting Thomas."

I'm here today to redeem Thomas. You see, I think Thomas was just like us. I feel a great affinity for Thomas. You see, I think Thomas was an academic. Thomas was the professor who challenged his students to do their work. Thomas wanted everything footnoted properly. Thomas was the disciple who made the best arguments and backed them up with evidence.

And while tradition has derided Thomas for his lack of faith, let's look at all that's going on earlier in John's gospel. Earlier, when Jesus and the disciples were being threatened in Galilee, Thomas says that he'll die for the cause, that he'll give his very life for Jesus. He wasn't on the fringe of this movement. Thomas was "all in."

Thomas's declaration about not believing until he touched Jesus' wounds was a very dramatic statement, but he wasn't asking for anything more than the other disciples had seen the week before.

Remember, the disciples didn't believe when Mary Magdalene came and told them the tomb was empty. They had to go and see for themselves.

Mary Magdalene didn't believe when she first saw Jesus. She thought he was the gardener. And the disciples didn't believe until Jesus walked through the wall and showed them his wounds during their Sunday night gathering.

So, let's not throw Thomas under the bus for wanting the same evidence all his friends had needed. It looks like they were all skeptical. Wouldn't you be?

Let's also look at what Jesus says to Thomas. More importantly, what did Jesus NOT say to Thomas?

Jesus didn't scold Thomas. He never put him down for doubting. He never said, "Weren't you paying attention when I said I was going to die and be raised again after three days?" Jesus doesn't say any of that. Jesus seems to be implying that wanting evidence is a natural expectation, that humans are trained to verify that which is not easily believed. Skepticism is an expected and valued part of our DNA.

Jesus seems to understand that what's happened is extraordinary and that everyone's responses are natural and normal: Mary Magdalene's reaction, the disciples' reaction, and Thomas's reaction. Jesus redeems Thomas's skepticism and so should we.

Let's redeem Thomas. Thomas, as much as any disciple, is one of us.

Thomas's doubts were born out of his innate curiosity. We see earlier in John's gospel that Thomas is a thinker. He was listening when Jesus was talking. In the midst of this very familiar passage from John Chapter 14, we usually pass over Thomas asking a question. Jesus says,

**14** "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe<sup>[a]</sup> in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup> And you know the way to the place where I am going."<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>5</sup> Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you know me, you will know<sup>[d]</sup> my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

I think the other disciples looked to Thomas for direction. I think the other disciples were eager for Thomas to see the risen Jesus. I think Thomas's interaction with Jesus that night was as important for the other disciples as it was for Thomas. I think they were waiting to see how Thomas would respond. Thomas was one of the thinkers in the group.

The disciples famously didn't "get" the gospel until after the resurrection. Not even Thomas, although he was obviously working at it.

But that second Sunday night. In that quiet room of terrified disciples. When Jesus walked through the walls a second time. When Thomas saw the risen Christ, he understood and he said, "My Lord and my God!"

Thomas understood. Thomas finally got it. Thomas's innate curiosity and desire to learn had found the mark. He had found the key that unlocked all his research into Jesus. He found the lens through which all his learning now made sense.

Jesus says it's ok to doubt. It's exploring our doubts that leads us to grow in new ways. It's the struggle with doubt that ultimately leads us closer to Jesus. To believe without doubt is not faith. It's blindness. To believe without doubt is to turn off both our minds and our spirits. To deny our doubt is to embrace personal and spiritual darkness. It's to place your spirit in a cave, devoid of the *true* light of Jesus. It's to choose to be spiritually blind. Nothing grows in that darkness. And that includes our spirits.

As we each engage our own struggles, let's redeem doubt. Let's use doubt to move us forward, to ask the hard questions, to lean in where the way isn't easy. One of my favorite authors is Anne Lamont. She puts it this way:

*"The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns."*

So, where is your doubt leading you during these days? What is God teaching you as you deal with the hard questions we're facing?

Are you learning in a deeper way the value of community? Of grace? Of patience? Of perseverance? Are you experiencing God's love in new ways? Challenging ways? Powerful ways?

Just like Thomas and the other disciples, we are entering a new world. A world that is different now and will be different after coronavirus. A world that will never be the same. A world we never would have chosen. A world that doesn't look anything like the one we anticipated.

Just like Thomas and the other disciples, our world is turned upside down. Our ideas of what is safe and what is not are turned on their heads. Our ideas of what is normal and what is not have been altered forever.

But just like Thomas and the other disciples, we have the presence of a risen Christ walking by our side on the journey. Christ, who calls us to grow not in spite of our doubts, but because of them, empowered by them. Christ who challenges our lives, our

minds, our hearts, and our spirits to a journey toward the unknown, unknown except for the assurance of Christ's presence with us as we move forward.

May we embrace the journey ahead, knowing that even though we are separated physically, we are never separated from the loving presence of Christ.

Thanks be to God!

Amen!