

## **Doubting Thomas**

April 19, 2009

It was a week after Easter, and the disciples were still shelled shocked. They were still mostly hiding in the upper room. They had ventured out for various things that they needed, and to meet friends. But on Sunday, which very quickly had begun to be called the Lord's day...the day of the Resurrection, they gathered together...to worship, to sing, to pray and to praise Jesus. And suddenly Jesus was there in their midst.

The doors were still locked against the possibility of the same people who had killed Jesus coming to stamp out the remainder of their little band of followers or Pilate deciding that this some what entertaining prophet named Jesus of Nazareth was more crazy than entertaining and it was time to do something about the remaining followers...so the disciples remained hidden behind locked doors. But the locks meant nothing to Jesus. He came to be among his followers then, as he does now in Spirit. He reassured them it was really Him...he was really Risen from the dead...see my hands, my feet, my side...believe!

He gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit, the breath or wind of God...the gift that he had promised while he was preparing them for his leaving while in the very upper room on the night before his betrayal. He promised not to leave them or us as orphans in the world, all alone. But to send the comforter, the Helper to be with us and within us...to give us strength and help and comfort and peace. And how Jesus makes good on that promise and breathes the breath of God upon his disciples that they might receive the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide them through these next days.

But there was one of the 12, one of the chosen disciples who was missing...Thomas. Thomas was not there that evening.

When the other disciples found Thomas later and told him everything that had happened, Thomas was sort of unreceptive you might say. He was down right unbelieving. Even Doubting...and thus his name forever...doubting Thomas.

There is a lesson here about missing Church...Thomas missed Jesus appearance because he missed the Sunday service...But that misses the point. The question is what do we do with our doubts? Thomas is a good role model for how to handle our doubts.

1. We all have doubts sometimes. Doubt is not faithlessness. Doubt is questioning...is perhaps not understanding or looking for a deeper understanding or deeper experience. In this case, Thomas did not have the same experience all the other disciples had. They had seen Jesus, he had not. They had seen the nail scars on Jesus' hands and feet. He had not. He is only asking for what they already had...to be able to see for himself.

One verse that I often remind people of in times like these is 2 Timothy 2: 13, where the Apostle Paul says that "If we are faithless, God will remain faithful, because he cannot deny disown himself". God is faithful to us, even when we lose faith and lose our way in life. We are saved by his grace, not by our faithfulness. His love is long suffering and endures forever.

2. Thomas expresses his doubts and questions. He does not keep them to himself and allow them to build and grow within. He talks them out with faithful friends who are mature enough to take them and talk them through with him. They don't freak out over Thomas' concerns, and you notice that Thomas is welcome in worship the following Sunday. They don't ostracize Thomas or make him feel out of place...or in some way unfaithful or a sinner for having doubts. He is one of them, one of the 12, and his struggle for faith and understanding is part of the

journey of them all...they have all fallen and faltered...look at Peter! No one is going to give anyone grief for a long time over a little doubt with Peter leading the group! Not after he denied Jesus publically three times in one night!

We need to foster a climate in Church where people are welcome regardless of where they are on the journey of faith...even if they have serious doubts or are at a peace with Christ and walk closely with Him every moment. All are welcome. How else will those who wonder and question get a true picture of what it is to walk with Jesus unless they are able to see authentic Christians and interact with them? Thomas was welcomed the following week...

3. Sometimes periods of doubts and questions lead us to a greater understanding of faith.

Doubting can be good. it makes our faith our own, rather than believing simply because everyone else does, or our parents or grandparents believed these things. When we doubt, we must be honest and must continue to honestly search for answers. Sometimes people use doubt as an excuse for not doing things that they find uncomfortable... Thomas did not give up the search, and did not search alone. He was honest about the search and exhaustive. Who better to be with than those who had claimed to have seen Christ...

Many who claim doubt do not honestly read, search the scripture, read material, pray...talk to God about your doubt...ask God to show God's self to you (if God is real, he will, if he is not, he won't and no harm done...). Our faith can become stronger following a period of honest questioning and doubting...searching and finding answers.

Remember, Jesus comes to Thomas, but does so while he is in worship with the other members of the community of faith. The answers are often not found when we are alone, but when we are together. Thomas finds his answers among the community of faith in honest

searching and dialogue, and it is here that Jesus comes to him. Jesus does not berate Thomas or begin with a verbal beat down. He is not made fun of or thought less of. If anything, Jesus goes out of his way to answer Thomas' questions and provide him what he needs to believe.

Thomas is quick to recognize that Jesus is indeed raised from the dead, and Thomas' faith goes further than the other disciples. Thomas' proclamation is more inclusive and thorough "My Lord and My God". Thomas understands that Jesus and God are indeed one, as Jesus has said repeatedly and that Jesus is indeed now Lord of all. As Risen Christ, he has shown that he has conquered death, sin and the powers of evil...and that he deserved our full commitment...holding nothing back. Thomas makes a full confession and commitment here...My Lord and My God...and he worships Jesus. Absolute devotion, commitment and worship. Thomas' doubt leads him to fuller understanding and thus a deeper commitment. Thomas is here ahead of the other disciples who do not quite yet understand what the resurrection means and who Jesus really is yet...

Jesus then has a word to say to us who follow these disciples. Thomas believes because he sees Jesus. Blessed are those who believe but do not see...that's us. The Bible says that we walk by faith, not by sight. We believe, even though we do not have the privilege of seeing Jesus face to face and seeing the nail scars on his hands, feet and the spear scar on his side. We believe not because of what we have seen...but because of what we have heard from others, and what we see in the world, and in other people's lives, and in our own lives, and what we feel...the work of the Spirit.

Jesus breathed on the Disciples in that Upper room the Holy Spirit. The night before his betrayal, he promised to not leave them alone, but to pray to the Father to send the comforter to be with them and to be in them...to give them his peace and his presence in their very lives. Before, Jesus walked among them and they could see him and

touch him...but when the Spirit came, he would be able to touch each person's mind and soul...and could live within each of us. And he breathed on them so they could receive the Holy Spirit. The Love of Christ, the Breath of God, the Presence of Christ...in this way, everyone can be touched by Jesus and feel his presence. We can't each touch the nail scarred hands, but we can be touched by his spirit.

The Spirit is like the wind, the word literally means breath...rough...the breath of God. The Spirit of God moving upon us, and in us. To help us sense Jesus, and feel him among us as we worship. We live by faith, not by sight. We live by the Spirit...walk by the spirit, live by the Spirit.

I know this by my life. I have never touched his hands or side or feet or seen him, but I know he is alive and he is real. I don't just believe it, I know it, because he touched me so many times and in so many ways. His spirit has blown through my life like a hurricane, powerful and strong, and like a gentle spring breeze that softly carries the sound of music and the scent of flowers and freshness. I have heard his voice like the clear singing of the nightingales song on a spring morning, crisp clear notes ringing out true in my soul, calling me to follow him.

Blessed are those who have not seen, yet believe. And John tells us Jesus did more signs and miracles that are not recorded in this book...and that this book is written so that you may read it...and that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ (the Savior, the Messiah of God), the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Amen and amen.