

## **Come Here, Thomas!**

**April 16, 2023**

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Good morning, good morning, good morning! If every morning was like this morning every morning would be a good morning, just like this morning is a good morning. Amen? Good morning! Welcome to this, the first Sunday after Easter. Traditionally, the ancient Church knew this as "Holy Hilarity Sunday." The resurrection is the greatest "Gotcha!" ever. Before I read our passage of Scripture today, I want to give a shout-out to the small army of people that made Lent, Holy Week, and Easter Sunday such a wonderful time. You led us to Christ's throne. You helped us to worship. So, to our media team, all of our musicians, our choir, all of our staff, everyone: bless you! But especially Pastor Pat, you had an awful lot of work to do!

I want to read a passage of scripture as we continue the story of the resurrection. This passage occurs Sunday evening. Jesus has risen from the dead. The ladies had experienced the empty tomb. Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene. She had gone and told the disciples that after they left, she saw Jesus. They thought she had been smoking wacky weed. And this is the next scene.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again, Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; and if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." May God bless the reading of His Word.

Have you ever been absolutely, positively, unequivocally certain you are right, only to find out you were wrong? I hate it when that happens. You know, there are not very many advantages to getting older, but if there is an advantage, at least for me, it robs me of a lot of my absolute certainty, because I have experienced enough times that I

have been positive I was right, only to find out I was wrong. I've experienced that many times. And I don't trust my memory like I used to. Can you relate to that? It kind of robs you of some of your absolute certainty. My first church, I know I use a lot of examples from that little church, a little Southern Baptist Church in south-central Mississippi. I was only there for two and a half years, but I don't think there was any other two-and-a-half-year period that I learned more than that period of time, probably because I knew so little when I got there. And they educated me, trust me! As I think about the man I was then, I was, looking back on it, extremely arrogant. I thought I knew everything I needed to know. And I thought it was my God-given responsibility to convert people to my way of thinking, because I was right. And I look back on that and I'm embarrassed by some of the things I preached as absolute truth. And I believe with all of my heart that what happened during those days is that the Holy Spirit spoke to those folks and gave them what they needed, despite what I said.

Now, I'm going to make a statement. Don't judge the statement until after I explain it. There is a lot of arrogance in absolute certainty. There is a lot of arrogance in absolute certainty. This is how I understand that. I believe what I believe, because I believe what I believe is right. If I did not believe what I believe was right, I would not believe what I believe. However, I will hold out the possibility, be it ever so slight, that I could be wrong. It's happened before. The other extreme is to be paralyzed by doubts. Today we're going to be talking about doubts, questions, and misconceptions. And as Christians, many times or most times when we start talking about doubts, we have to drag Thomas into the conversation, right? And I think the guy gets a bum rap, and by the time we get through, I hope you think the same thing.

Now, our story begins with the disciples, gathering probably in the upper room where they had the Last Supper. They gathered in what was an atmosphere of terror. They were wondering if there was a cross out there with their name on it. After all, Jesus said, "If they hate me, what will they do to you?" John is very, very clear that Jesus is not there. And he tells us that the doors are locked. Jesus is not there. And then, all of a sudden, Jesus is there. He doesn't come through the windows. He doesn't come through the doors. He wasn't there and then he is there. And in our Scripture he says, "Peace be with you." Now, the Jesus I know has a sense of humor. And the Jesus I know didn't go, "Peace be with you." He goes, "**Peace!**" And after they peel themselves off the walls and dig themselves out from under the table, he says, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." There's another great sermon in that, but that's not the one for today. He showed them the reality of the resurrection. He had told them that he was going to rise from the dead. They had seen the empty tomb, and now he appears to them. This is Jesus' pattern. Earlier that week he said, "If you want to be great in the kingdom of heaven, you must be a servant." And he took off his clothes and he took up a towel and he washed the disciples' feet, and said, "This is how you serve." Then he said, "I want you to love one another as I love you." And then he died on a cross and showed them what love looks like. He told them that he was going to be raised from the dead, he showed them the empty tomb, and then he appeared to them in person. This is Jesus' pattern.

Problem: Thomas is not there. And when the disciples say, "Thomas, we have seen the Lord!", he said, "Yeah, right. I was there Friday." Now, one of the things that I think I know about this church: it is full of a lot of independent thinkers. Am I right? Okay. You're there on Friday. Do you believe Jesus is alive? I don't care who says it, I gotta see it. Thomas hadn't seen it; he didn't believe it. If you read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, you will come to the conclusion that there is no doubt Thomas is absolutely devoted to Jesus Christ. When the disciples and Jesus received word about Lazarus, and Jesus determined to go back to Jerusalem, the disciples begged him not to go. When he said, "Nevertheless, I'm going," it was Thomas who stood up and said, "Then let us go back with him, that we might die with him." You see, the cross was what Thomas expected. The resurrection is what he could not understand. And Thomas had two great virtues. One was that he refused to say he understood what he did not understand; he refused to say he believed what he did not believe. And, when he became absolutely convinced, he was in all the way.

So, they're gathered a week later. Same place, doors locked. Jesus is not there, but Thomas is. Jesus appears and he goes, "**Peace!**" And then he says, "Thomas, come here. Come here. Let me show you something." And Thomas' response was not, "My Lord," but, "My Lord and my God!" Now he's all in. And I want you to note, Jesus is not threatened by Thomas' doubts. And Thomas is not rejected; he is restored. Jesus was not threatened by Thomas' doubts, and he's not threatened by your doubts. There may be times when you have doubts. What do you do? You keep moving forward. Sometimes we talk about the faith as if it is all or nothing. That is not true. Let me say that again. Sometimes we talk about the faith as if it's all or nothing. That is not true. You don't have to understand everything or believe everything to have a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. Y'all hear me? It's okay if you have doubts. It's okay if you have questions. God is bigger than your doubts. God is bigger than your questions. Don't allow them to paralyze you. Keep moving forward.

I have good news and bad news. The good news is you're not ever going to understand everything. The bad news is you're not ever going to understand everything. I think about that arrogant young man that pastored my first church. You know what his problem was? He didn't understand enough yet to understand how much he didn't know. You see, you have to gain a great deal of knowledge before you understand how ignorant you are. That was my problem. I had not gained enough knowledge to know how much I didn't know. But, trust me when I tell you, they educated me in what I did not know. And I soon realized just how far I had to go and what I needed to know. And I hope what I'm about to say doesn't disturb you, but as I have learned more, what I have found every time I learn more, I learn that there's even more to know. And when I learn there's more to know, I have more questions. And what I've come to know is, that's okay. God is not threatened by my questions.

So, how do you respond? Keep an open mind. Keep moving forward. Because one day, be it ever so slight, you might be wrong again. Thomas had been there on Friday. He did not believe the resurrection happened. Thomas was absolutely certain, and he was wrong. You and I have been absolutely certain, only to find out that we were wrong. That could happen again. You know, if you get to heaven and you find out that one of

your core beliefs is wrong, I doubt you're gonna go, "God, that's not what I believe. Just send me to hell." I don't think that's going to happen. Or worse yet, you get to heaven and you find out that there are people there that you didn't think were going to be there, and you say, "I'm not spending eternity with them!"

So, hear me. Just because you have doubts and questions, it doesn't mean you can't have a vibrant, vital relationship with Jesus Christ. Embrace that. Jesus is not threatened by your doubts, by your questions, or by your misconceptions. After all, Jesus knows you and loves you anyway. It's okay to have questions and doubts. And it's even okay if you're wrong. Let's pray.

So, I want you to hear loudly and clearly that Jesus sees beyond your questions and your doubts and loves you just as you are. Keep moving forward. Keep believing what you believe. Let's pray.

God, we are so grateful that You see us as we are, know exactly who we are, know our questions, know our doubts, know our fears, and know where we are wrong. And You love us anyway. We are grateful for that, Lord. In Christ's name, amen.