



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea
The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida

“Thomas – the believer – our twin”
April 27, 2025 – Easter C2
John 20:19-31

A Homily by The Rev'd Jo Popham

“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,” Thomas said this when the other disciples told him “We have seen the Lord.” While Thomas was “out” not only had the others seen the risen Jesus, the resurrected Christ in the flesh, in living color, they had received the Holy Spirit when the Lord breathed on them. But Thomas missed it. Obviously, Thomas was less fearful of arrest by the authorities than the others, for he was not locked away in the room where the disciples crouched in the dark. A week later Thomas was with them when Jesus appeared again to them all. “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.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Thomas believed. He did not need to touch the Lord to believe. He needed only to see.

I grew up thinking that Thomas was a doubter, one of the bad boys of the Bible. But in the Gospel according to John, Thomas professed his faith in Jesus; on this account he should be called Thomas the believer. I wonder why it is that Thomas has gotten such a bad reputation. All the disciples but two ran away when our Lord was crucified. And the one who denied Jesus – not once but three times – became the cornerstone of the church. Didn't two of Jesus's favorites argue over who was to be first? Were not the disciples still counting fish and loaves of bread while Jesus readied to feed thousands? And all the disciples cowered in the boat during the storm as Jesus slept! And yet Thomas became the example of disbelief. I know that in my life, I have doubted more times than I can count. And I know that my children have been doubters. Haven't we all have been doubter? All been guilty of seeing and not seeing? Jesus wants us to learn a new way of seeing.

We have not seen, yet we too believe. Don't we? Or are we 21st century thinkers more like the show-me disciple? After all, seeing IS believing, is it not? Don't we need proof? Must we be certain of facts before we can believe something is true – or untrue? Can we believe something without direct, physical, personal, empirical evidence? Or have we all become skeptics? How do we deal with mystery in the 21st century? How do we believe in a world of non-believers? The difference in believing and non-believing is like going from black and white to color. It is a more distinct difference than going from analog to digital picture quality.

If we need proof to explain the mystery of believing, as Thomas believed, perhaps we need to look hard at what we do know. Was Thomas simply a doubter as we remember him over the centuries, or ought he be remembered more for his faith? What more do we know of Thomas from Scripture?

- 1) When Jesus's friend Lazarus died, Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him' (John 11:16). After Jesus was crucified the other disciples were fearful of going out for they knew that some wished them harm too. But Thomas was unafraid and was willing to go out, even if it meant his death. He was faithful by venturing out into the world while the others hid indoors.
- 2) Later when Jesus said: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 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? 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. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas asked what the disciples – and we – are hesitant to ask: 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' (John 14:1-5)? Thomas did not want to be left behind. He wanted to go where his Lord was.

- 3) Then we have today's reading where Thomas is painted as a doubter, yes, but an honest doubter, and a believer. When Thomas was out – perhaps getting provisions for Jesus's followers who were too afraid to be seen in public – we are told that he did not see Jesus the first time he appeared to the other disciples.
- 4) And when Jesus appeared to the disciples again, Thomas was there. The risen Jesus came through shut doors and offered them peace. He offered Thomas his hands and side as proof that he had indeed been raised from the dead. Thomas did not need to touch him; he no longer doubted but believed, saying "My Lord and my God."
- 5) Later Thomas along with six of the other disciples by the lake – when fishing had been bad the night before – Jesus came and sent them back out to haul in a great catch. Thomas obeyed his Lord by going back out on the water to fish. The next morning he recognized the Lord at breakfast, but only after Jesus had charcoaled fish and broken bread with them on the beach (John 21).

These mentions of Thomas are all in John's Gospel, but the last place Thomas is named is in the Acts of the Apostles (1:13-14) on the occasion of Pentecost. In the upper room Thomas was with Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James and Simon, and Judas the brother of James, and all the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, along with Jesus's other brethren. They all were gathered together in prayer, awaiting the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thomas often was known as Didymus – in Greek meaning twin. We know nothing about his twin. Could that be intentional? I think that – maybe in some ways – Thomas (the twin) is our twin. Thomas had his doubts, but he resisted those doubts by faith. In my sanctified imagination, I see us as his twin, facing the choice between seeing and not seeing, or of seeing more clearly, even seeing in vivid living color – if not believing yet believing through faith. Imagine with me what St. Andrew's By-the-Sea will look like in the future. Where will we be? Where will we celebrate Holy Communion? What will be

our calling to serve, to be Christ's hands and feet and voice here in Destin? Are we not all Thomases, willing to venture out into a world without knowing what's next – wondering what new opportunities we will see for ministry in the Diaspora? Aren't we just like Thomas doubting but still taking the next uncertain steps in faith to be who we are – just without this building, the steeple, the Celtic cross atop with our ever present Osprey who likes to perch there? Aren't we Thomas's twin just without our identity as THE Episcopalians in Destin on Highway 98? Imagine what St. Andrew's By-the-Sea will do – what we will look like in the future without the restrictions of doubt and fear that bind us?

Lord, give us faith. Give us confidence in the future. Lord, send the Holy Spirit to empower us to step into that future with boldness.

My friends, have faith! Do not doubt! Blessed are we who have not seen and yet believe!

Lord, may it be so. Amen.