



## **"What Now?...Living With Doubt"**

### **Second Sunday Of Easter**

Sunday, April 19, 2020

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John 20:19-31

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Traditionally, we know this story as "Doubting Thomas." Maybe you have heard people say things like "Don't be a doubting Thomas." Honestly, I feel bad for him...poor Thomas. Biblical history and its commentators have given him such a bad rap. We now view Thomas as someone we shouldn't be like because he didn't believe Jesus. Thomas was a doubter. He was skeptical. He wanted hard evidence.

But Thomas is someone we should want to emulate. Let's be real with ourselves here. We – and all those that have gone before us – give Thomas a bad rap because he says something here that we are afraid, ashamed to say. Thomas is brave, friends. Thomas is faithful. We should take a page out of Thomas' book.

But first, let's talk about what is going here. This is the evening after Mary Magdalene saw Jesus in the garden. The disciples are hunkered down, locked in a house, and they are afraid. Sound familiar?

What are the disciples afraid of? Well, sure, the author of John says, "for fear of the Jews," but let's be clear here. This is fear of the Jewish authorities, those in power. This is NOT fear of the Jewish people.

There is also another fear laced into this story. The disciples are afraid that Jesus isn't who he said he was. The disciples are afraid that Jesus might not be the Son of God. They are afraid Jesus won't live up to his promises. The disciples did not believe Mary when she said, "I have seen the Lord."

And friends, I totally get this fear right now. Maybe you do too? I so desperately want Jesus to be who he says he is. I so desperately want to feel comforted and not alone. I want to feel Jesus' presence, his peace, and his grace. But there are so many moments that I don't.

As an intern chaplain years ago, I told my Clinical Pastoral Education aka CPE cohort that there have been many moments in my life in which I felt like this: desperately wanting to believe but struggling to do so. One of my colleagues reacted to this confession saying, "Why don't you just believe? Aren't you embarrassed to doubt God?" This response made me so angry and it was so unhelpful. It made me feel

shame. It made me feel like my faith wasn't strong enough to believe God was present in those tough moments. I felt like I was being labeled "a doubting Thomas."

We label Thomas as a doubter because he is honest with himself and he is honest with Jesus. We look at Thomas and think, "he is so weak in faith. Why can't he just believe?" as if his request makes him unfaithful. We as Christians are made to think that expressing our doubts make us weak. We are made to think that our faith can't falter.

But no, Thomas is not weak. He is faithful. Thomas is not wavering. He is brave. Thomas insists that Jesus show up. Thomas publicly names what he needs to believe, and he does it without shame. So, this got me thinking, what do I need to believe? What do you need to believe?

Thomas shows us that it's okay to demand. Thomas shows us that this is part of faith. Between the lines, I hear Thomas saying, "Jesus has showed up before, and he will do it again."

And show up, he does. Jesus shows up and brings his peace to the disciples. He breathes on them the Holy Spirit. Better yet, he breathes into them the Holy Spirit. This Greek word used here *emphysao* means "breathing into" and recalls two Old Testament stories of new life: the creation story of God breathing life into Adam and a story we just heard a few weeks ago from Ezekiel, God breathing life into dry bones.

In the midst of their fear, Jesus gives each disciple the breath of new life, the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' breath tells the disciples that this life of fear isn't the end; new life is coming.

And still, I hear Thomas saying to me, saying to you: "Jesus has showed up before, and he will do it again."

The way this story ends is hope for us: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe...these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God..."

We are the blessed, friends. This story is written for us. Though we may not see, we are encouraged to believe. We are given these stories of experiences with God to fill us with hope, to remind us that Jesus has showed up before and he will do it again. He will become present among us and breathe new life into each of us. He promises this life of fear is not the end; new life is coming.

These stories give us examples of followers of Jesus before us, like Thomas: followers who struggled, followers with fear, followers with faith in Christ so deep they insisted he show up.

What now, friends? What are we do while we are shuttered inside, locked away in fear? We are to insist that Jesus show up. We are to beg our God to be present among us. We are to name what we need to believe.

Because as Thomas' faith shows us, Jesus hears us. Jesus has showed up before, and he will do it again. Amen.

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