

## **“Trusting Doubt” – John 20:19-31 – April 19, 2020**

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While Thomas is listed as a disciple of Jesus in each of the four gospels, it is only in John's gospel where he has been given a voice. We know him as the one who doubts. He also shows up in the story of the Raising of Lazarus. When the disciples are afraid for Jesus to go back to area where the authorities are looking to arrest him, Thomas say, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." The final passage where we see Thomas, is following their last Passover meal together, Jesus tells his disciples that he going away to prepare a place for them and that they know the way. Thomas responds, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" And Jesus responds, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

Though only mentioned a few times, we begin to form an image of Thomas as a human. He doubts, yes. But he is loyal, willing to die with his teacher. And he is pragmatic – pointing out what seems obvious, we can't go to you if we don't know where you are.

I see Thomas as someone who has learned a few hard lessons during his life. He doesn't trust what he has not experienced himself. Perhaps he has discovered that not everyone is trustworthy - that those you rely on may let you down. So he doesn't easily trust someone. You have to earn his trust. But once you do, he appears to be a fiercely loyal friend. The type that always has your back. That will stand beside you even the odds are against you. And he's a realist and looks at the world in a logical way. He wants to make his own way when he understands the objective. And once he does, he'll make a plan. The quickest path between point A and B may be a straight line, but it might not be the best path. Thomas seems like the one who would figure out the best path. He is not impulsive, but he is not afraid to speak up when he has something to say. He approaches life cautiously.

So when we look at this resurrection appearance story, Thomas is labeled as the one who doubts. I find it ironic that all the disciples had doubted the women's story of the risen Lord until they experienced him in the flesh. But when Thomas doubts their story, too, his doubt is labeled as something negative. Part of that is the time period. The testimony of a woman was always suspect.

Thomas loved Jesus immensely. Trusted him. That is evident by his reaction when he did finally see Jesus. His heart had been broken by the brutal death that Jesus suffered. He was probably disgusted by the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, which made the death even that more poignant for one who held loyalty in such esteem. And as one who had undoubtedly experienced tragedy before, he was not about to get his hopes up over something that his logical brain could not fathom.

Thomas' reaction to the tale of resurrection was true to his personality. Because of that, I think perhaps we should not be so hard on him. How would any of us have reacted in a similar situation? The experience of trauma can bring out the best in people and the worst. And none of us will react in exactly the same way. If anything, our reactions will most likely be automatic.

As I have been thinking about this story of Thomas' reaction in light of our global pandemic, it caused me to think about how we humans react to trauma and upheaval. After a month of the shelter in place order, we have seen the best and worst in people.

Prolonged trauma is tiring. It wears us down, saps us of our energy. Our brains rely on the ancient instinctual patterns to keep us functioning as such a high level of alert. Perhaps you have noticed that in yourselves and in your families. Exhaustion, depleted mental functioning. Forgetfulness. Feeling on edge emotionally. Wanting things to get back to normal. We long for some semblance of the familiar, but each day, each week brings a new normal. I am beginning to tire of the designation "new normal" as are many of you. And we definitely see the struggle of society at large as people clamor for return to normalcy.

Yet as some have begun to point out, normal really wasn't that great. At least not for everyone. This global pandemic has offered us the opportunity to make some future changes for the benefit of all people, as we look at what it means to be civilization and community in a post-pandemic world. We also must first take care of ourselves. Recently I have seen the airplane safety instructions used in our Covid-19 world – make sure you secure your own oxygen mask before helping those around you. You can't help anyone if you're passed out from lack of oxygen.

We are in a time of worldwide trauma. That's the reality of this moment. Our bodies automatically react to trauma in ways that may surprise how we see ourselves and how we respond to others and how others respond to us. This is time to be gentle with ourselves and each other. Supportive of ourselves and each other. Forgiving of ourselves and each other.

Jesus loved Thomas. Jesus also understood Thomas. The second resurrection experience to the disciples in the house where they gathered was solely for Thomas' benefit. Jesus knew what Thomas needed, and he gave that "in the flesh" experience to him as an expression of his compassion and love. Thomas was still stuck in his time of trauma, and he needed to be healed. And so Christ came to heal him. Following that time, the lives of the disciples were never the same.

Friends, we are in our moment of trauma, and we do not know how long this will last. We have no idea what is going to come next. We have been confronted with something beyond our control and there is not much we can do except to ride it out. It may feel like our bodily reactions are on autopilot, and they are. But our thoughtful actions, how we choose to act in this time will reflect the values that have the most meaning for us. What are those values we hold dear?

Like Thomas, we are currently living in our crisis moment, and we need healing. Let us look to Christ guide us through this time, and let us be Christ to one another. We are the community of faith. We are the Church, the Body of Christ.