

Scripture:  
Acts 2:14a, 22-32  
John 20:19-31

### **In-between Time**

Right away I want you to try to let go of everything you know and think you know about Thomas. Forget that you think he's a doubter - scripture calls him the Twin - that is the only descriptor we have for him. Forget that you think he's the only one that doesn't trust because the rest of them are locked behind closed doors for good reason. We forget that Thomas encourages the disciples to follow Jesus into Judea at the news of the death of Lazarus his words being "so that we might die with him." Thomas is a realist, he's practical. He saw Jesus crucified and buried why would he think Jesus was now alive? To believe it to be true he simply wants what everyone else got. He wants to see Jesus for himself.

That being said, I bet he had a long hard week. It struck me when I read this scripture last week. Did you notice that it was a whole week before Jesus re-entered the room. Perhaps they all gathered together at that same time weekly and something had taken Thomas away the week before. We don't know but this is what the scripture tells us.

"So the other disciples told *Thomas*, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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." (the scripture continues)

26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." John 20:25-26

A week later Jesus appears again- imagine - a week later. What kind of a week was that for Thomas? Imagine a week where all of your closest companions have had a profound, life-changing, life-giving experience that you haven't. Imagine a full week of them saying to you - but it's true. We know it's true - just trust us. Imagine Thomas wondering if they had all eaten something that made them hallucinate. Imagine Thomas feeling hurt because he didn't have the experience. Maybe Jesus didn't love him like he loved the others. Imagine Thomas trying to convince himself to believe his trusted friends but not being able to land with certainty. Imagine how left out he would have felt, how abandoned by circumstance, how hurt.

We've all had the experience where friends or family members have had a good time together and we have missed out because we had to work, or we had the flu, or we couldn't get a babysitter. Whether it be a wedding, a game, a holiday celebrations, or drinks with the gang we know what it is to miss out. My friends and I call it FOMO - "Fear of missing out." Now,

imagine it being an experience of missing out on the resurrected Christ. Poor Thomas. He gets such a bad wrap for being human. For wanting the same experience his friends had.

He faced a significant in-between time. A time between death and resurrection, a time between knowing for certain and facing wonder, confusion, unknowing and doubt. We know what it is to be in the in-between time a little too well these days. I am in regular conversations with folks right now who feel like they know exactly how things will work out for our congregations. Ministry alive, vibrant, hope-filled, flourishing. Mission for community and church alike. And I have folks who just want to see the space so that they can better understand. They want to experience it, touch it, feel it, see it. And I have conversations with others that feel it is more comfortable and safe to remain just as we are. All of these people are faithful people. All are discerning or attempting to do so. All are in the same in-between time and we are all wrestling with it the best we can longing to have a resurrection experience that transforms us all. I get Thomas. I would like to have Jesus walk into the room and show me the right direction to go.

John A. Nelson wrote “At Bible Study, a wise fellow in our church shared what he learned from another wise teacher. Put a question to twenty people in a room, and you'll get twenty opinions (or more). Talk through those, discuss and listen, and they'll settle into a few groupings of opinions. Talk some more, and the number of opinions will likely reduce further. Until there are two, which are in opposition.

It's the opposition that is most needed, most desirable. The creative tension gives a stable foundation.

*Nelson continues* In one church, a painful rift developed between church members who wanted to use scarce funds to spruce up the church's fellowship hall, which was showing its age, and those members who wanted the funds to go directly to needy persons. This was not a creative tension: it was divisive and bitter. I still recall the pastor preaching about it. He didn't say what should be done with the funds. He identified that there were, at the moment, two kinds of people in the church: people of pilgrimage, with a calling to go to unknown places of service, and people of blessing, with a calling to give hospitality. What I remember mostly was how much love and respect he witnessed, for both. And that neither can be entirely faithful, without the other.”<sup>1</sup>

We are in times of questions, in-between times. We will have doubts, we will want to see facts. I have always experienced faith and doubt woven closely together. Faith, after all, isn't knowledge but instead "is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews: 11:1).

I feel for Thomas in that in-between week. In the week of unknowing, in the faith-testing week, in the week where his cherished companions likely questioned his friendship, his faith, his commitment. I feel for him because I have been there. In the in-between - in the place of hope

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<sup>1</sup> Still Speaking Daily Devotional April 20, 2017

and promise, wonder and doubt. A few of us are on a journey where people we thought were on our side suddenly are questioning our commitments, our faith, our company.

Thomas is not alone. We are not alone. Jesus blesses us and encourages us when he says we are faithful when we believe even when we have not seen. Once Thomas “encountered Jesus, his faith is as realistic as was his skepticism, as he doesn't merely believe but also makes the chief confession in John's gospel, acclaiming Jesus not only as "my *Lord*" -- the title reserved for Caesar in the first century -- but also "my *God*," the highest praise of Jesus made in the New Testament and an echo of the opening line of John's Gospel.”<sup>2</sup>

“Little wonder that John follows this scene with his own two-sentence purpose statement: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). In other words, what happens to Thomas is exactly what John hopes will happen to each of us when we read his story.”<sup>3</sup>

Some versions of the scripture say “so that you may continue to believe” rather than come to believe. I think we need to hear both.

These words are written so that you might keep on believing because the resurrection is not a guarantee that believing gets any easier. We know that. No matter how good things get. Even if Jesus walked in this room today and said “follow me I will make the journey light” some of us would doubt and question whether we really wanted to follow. We might say - oh but Jesus I’ve got dinner with my family tonight, or dragon boat practice. I’ve got to be at work in the morning. Or would we say “My Lord and My God” I believe and follow and be witness to resurrection and life?

The Acts passage reminds us after-all that resurrection is the establishment of a new future. Resurrection is about new life and transformed community. As the church changes and lives into the faith story by following Jesus today we continue to prove the truth of the resurrection. But it is a constant changing, a constant following, a constant journey. Resurrection is about the restoration of relationship with God and one another. Just as God breathes life into Jesus, he continues to breathe life into us. And yet Jesus is not raised to the same way. A transformation happened. The marks of crucifixion were still there and yet he was completely different.

At the heart of the Thomas story is a simultaneous wondering; what we are doing here, and a desperate need to be told we belong here. “Come to believe/continue to believe” gives us permission to acknowledge that our faith and life often exists in that in-between space, lingering somewhere between the I believe and I wonder. Some where between the determination to invite

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<sup>2</sup> Lose, David working preacher IBID

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others into a relationship with Jesus, and a desperate need to be encouraged in our own relationship with God.” In between spaces are not always comfortable spaces. In fact, our tendency is to resolve the tension, and sometimes prematurely. Depending on the day and the situations of our lives, we will lean toward one side or the other, and that’s okay, too.”<sup>4</sup> To exist in the in-between place of faith and wonder, assurance and curiosity is an acceptable place to be. If we are honest, with a kind of resurrection honesty, it is the place where many of us exist most of the time.

“Just because we are on this side of the resurrection does not demand a displaced dismissal of doubt.” So, as we continue in the journey of life and the journey of our congregations this Easter season lets be resurrection people. People who have faith in the promise that God is with us, that new life is and will happen. But lets be honest people in our resurrection moments as we pray and say to our God from time to time “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (14:5). We don’t do ourselves any favours by trying to convince ourselves otherwise. Maybe that is as real as we can be, acknowledging that sometimes we also need to have a personal experience with Resurrection so that we too can believe. Acknowledging that even though we have had one in the past we might need another so that we can continue to believe. Now that Easter has happened it does not illuminate the crucifixion. We see God’s solidarity with us in the marks in his hands and side. They are witness to the incarnation. This Easter story is not just an ancient story it is the story of life. Death is real, and life is real. Sometimes the old must die so that God can breathe life into something new. But as we live in the midst of it we live with Thomas and the disciples in the in-between. Hoping, wondering, curious for the possibility, doubting the promise. As you journey in faith remember we are all Gods children and each of us carries with us faith and doubt, hope and despair, love and promise.

Thank you God for Thomas who reminds us that we are only human in our faith journey, as he lives to tell the story of your love for us even in our wonder, curiosity and doubt. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis, Karoline