

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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No Doubt!

- 1. Thomas' situation**
- 2. Our situation**

**Hymns: 163 – 160 - Distribution: 165, 158 -
Closing: 162**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

John 20:19-31 – 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; 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 finger 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.

Seeing is... believing!

I'm sure most of you have heard that old saying. And I am also sure that most of you operate under that philosophy in your daily lives as well!

For example, suppose I said to you, "I can take these two paper clips and hook them together without touching them or manipulating them directly with my hands." Would that be easy for you to believe? It doesn't make sense, does it? How can I possibly connect these two paper clips while not touching them or directly manipulating them with my hands? You probably would say, "Let's see it!" After all, seeing is believing.

Here's how you do it. You need a dollar bill. You take the dollar and fold it into thirds. Next, I will take one paper clip and clip the top section of the dollar to the middle section. Now I will take the other paper clip and clip the bottom section to the middle section. The paper clips are not hooked together and I will not be touching or directly moving them. I will slowly pull on the two ends of the dollar bill. Watch what happens! (Pull) They're hooked!

So now you believe it. This is the way we operate in our daily lives. We could apply the same saying to one of the disciples of Jesus after the first Easter Day – Thomas. For him, seeing was believing. Without seeing, doubt dominated his heart. It was a serious situation.

On this first Sunday after Easter, let's examine this account and learn about doubt and faith. Let's consider the theme "**No doubt!**" as we see the assurances that Jesus gave to Thomas and the other disciples.

1. Thomas' situation

After reading about the first appearance of Jesus in this text, we hear, "***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 finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.***"

Thomas had doubts, serious doubts! Undoubtedly, he was taking the crucifixion and burial of Jesus very hard. When Jesus told his

disciples in John 11 that he was bound and determined to go to Jerusalem, Thomas had said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (11:16) He very likely had a strong bond with his Lord.

Thomas' doubts were expressed in quite a bold statement. He used a double negative in his contention to his fellow disciples, which added emphasis to what he was feeling. We might say today, "I will never ever believe it!" Or, "I will in no way believe it!" He also made a pretty graphic statement about what it would take for him to believe that Jesus had appeared. He must put his finger into the nail holes and his hand into his pierced side!

The problem that Thomas was having was an "internal" one. Listen again to what he said: "*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.*" This was an internal problem, focused on his own perspective. He had "I trouble." Thomas represents a great attitude for a "modern man." He is skeptical of it all and must see for himself. It wasn't that he lacked obvious facts about the resurrection. Jesus himself had taught his disciples numerous times that he would be put to death and that he would rise on the third day. And here his own friends were insistent that they had seen the Lord. The women on Easter morning had testified as to what they saw. Mary Magdalene no doubt had told about Jesus' appearance by the garden tomb. The incident with the disciples on the road to Emmaus; but he would not be persuaded. **Thomas had to see - and even touch - for himself.**

Down through time, Thomas certainly has been remembered for his doubt. It certainly was a clear case of it, but I think Thomas has taken too much of a bad rap for his doubt. He will forever be remembered as Doubting Thomas, but we don't refer to Denying Peter or Slow Philip. Yet Thomas will always carry that nickname. Also, I personally only know of one church that's named St. Thomas Lutheran Church. He hasn't become a namesake of too many congregations.

Doubt had plagued the rest of the disciples as well. Consider:

- "*(The disciples) did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.*" (Luke 24)
- "*Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.*" (Mark 16:14)
- The disciples on the road to Emmaus certainly had lost their hopes and needed Jesus to restore them!

All the disciples of Jesus had their doubts after he was put to death. Again, it was an internal problem; it wasn't a case of them not having heard. **Doubt reigned!**

Then Jesus came with his solution. What grace he had for the doubter! Jesus did not give up on Thomas. He did not let the other disciples have an opportunity to vote him out of their ranks. Jesus came to the one with the flickering faith to build him up. He did not have to meet Thomas' coarse demands, yet we hear: "*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 made a second appearance, especially for his doubting follower. The solution to Thomas' doubts was external, not inside himself but only from Jesus. What vivid words Jesus used as he addressed Thomas. Literally, Jesus told him, "Bring your finger here... Bring your hand here..." For the one who had to see it with his own eyes and touch him with his own hands, Jesus obliged.

The result was unforgettable. Thomas simply exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" We also have some words from the other disciples who would later reflect on the certainty of the risen Christ:

1 John 1 - "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which

we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us."

- *2 Peter 1 – "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."*

For Thomas the Doubter, tradition tells us that his renewed faith led him to an active life of serving as a missionary. Tradition claims that he sailed for India to preach the gospel in 52 A.D. The symbol for St. Thomas is the builder's square with a spear through it. Traditions tell us that he built a church or palace with his own hands in India and that he was martyred by a spear in 72 A.D. **Thomas seems to have lived out his confession of faith.**



2. Our situation

Doubt, of course, is nothing new. When Eve was tempted in the Garden of Eden by the serpent, she doubted God's command. When Abraham doubted whether it was possible for God to bring about a pregnancy in his elderly wife as he had promised, he was led into rash action. When Peter saw the winds and waves as he walked out toward Jesus, he doubted and began to sink. And what about you? Do you have your doubts?

When we think about doubting, perhaps the best place to start is realizing what the nature of faith is. Scripture says:

- *"Faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for." (Hebrews 11:1,2)*

- *"We live by faith, not by sight." (2 Co. 5:7)*
- *"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face." (1 Corinthians 13:12)*

There's no mistaking that the nature of faith includes trust in what is not clearly seen or experienced. As Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Honestly, you could question whatever facts you want to question. I might tell you my name is Mark, that I was born in Portland, OR, and that I did complete my seminary training to become a pastor, but you could question all of it, no matter what documented "proof" I produce.

The devil can plague us with doubt in many different forms:

1. Some doubt the past, and question whether God's acts really happened. God tells us that he created this world by his power in six days. Doubt says, "I don't think he could do that." He tells us that when sin corrupted the world terribly, that he caused a worldwide flood that eradicated all people but Noah's family and that it drastically changed our world. Doubt says, "I wonder if that could really happen." He tells us that he placed our sins on his own Son so that he could suffer and die for them and pay the price of our salvation, and that he rose again on the first Easter Sunday. Doubt says, "Could God really do that? I didn't see it."
2. Others doubt about God's love for them, due to their present situation. Doubt says, "If God really loved you, he wouldn't let hardship come upon you." It says, "If God were really in charge, he would make this world a perfect place." Doubt says, "Why would God allow so many difficulties in my life?"
3. Others have doubts about the future, and wonder if God will preserve them and bring them safely to heaven. Doubt says, "Maybe God will forget about me with all the other people in the world." Doubt says, "I wonder if I'll safely get to heaven." "I wonder if heaven is for real."

Our Lord has a solution to our doubts. At the end of our reading John wrote, *“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.”* Where does God point us at times of doubt? Not to anything internal inside us, but to something external, to the Word that he has given us. *“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17)*

God has direct promises about his Word:

- God promises that it is the truth. Numbers 23 says, *“God is not a man that he should lie.”* Jesus prayed about his disciples, *“Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth.” (John 17:17)* **God has clearly told us that this revelation he has given to us is the truth!**
- Sufficiency – God promises that his Word is “enough” for us to know and believe. If you recall Jesus’ parable of The Rich Man and Poor Lazarus, when the rich man wanted Lazarus to be sent back from the dead to warn his brothers to get serious about spiritual matters, he was told, *“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” (Luke 16:31)* **The Word is enough for us to know and believe for salvation.**
- Effectiveness – **God has told us that his Word is effective in and of itself to work, build up, and to sustain faith.** “Signs and wonders” are not to be demanded from him, and are secondary to the effectiveness of the Word of God.

As if this weren’t enough, we even see external proofs about the truth of God’s words and promises of God. We don’t base our faith on “secondary proofs,” but they are worth noting:

- Eyewitnesses – The Scriptures of our New Testament were recorded by eyewitnesses of these events. If you’re

familiar with writing or journalism, we call these “primary sources.” They are not secondary sources or researchers long after the facts. They were written by eyewitnesses.

- Uniqueness – The Scriptures reveal the only way of salvation known in the world where you have a Savior and do not have to earn your way to heaven. Every other religion made up by any man is based on your works.
- Fulfilled prophecy – Hundreds of prophecies about the Messiah were fulfilled specifically by Jesus Christ.
- Unity – Down through the centuries, no one has ever been able to point out a single contradiction among the books of the Bible. Scripture contains no geographical, historical, or any other mistake in its recording of facts. Perhaps you’ve heard of a contemporary Christian named Josh McDowell. When he was younger, he went on a crusade to “prove the Bible wrong,” and ended up so immersed in the truth and harmony of the Word that he became a Christian!
- Hindsight – We see through the eyes of faith more clearly than ever in world history, as we can follow the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation through Christ and his grace and mercy in preserving his believers. We can only imagine what it would have been like to be an individual like Abraham in the Old Testament, where such hindsight was not possible!

With all this in mind, it’s no surprise that it is vital to stay connected with the Word. It is our faith’s food and nutrition. It is our lifeline. It is God’s truth that speaks to us. And his Supper also is a visible gospel through which he, shows us and touches us with Christ’s body and blood and gives us the assurance that he truly died for our sins. **This is what God has more than thoroughly revealed about himself and his works and has bid us believe.**

Finally, not all of our questions will be answered. There are still things in this present world and the end of time that are to be fulfilled. We do not see them now. But our Lord has revealed his plan to us in his Word and bid us believe his truth. Through his Holy Spirit, may this leave no doubt! Amen.