

Easter 2B - 2021

If I were to mention the names of certain disciples to you and ask you to write down the first word that comes into your mind, it is unlikely you would come up with the same words. If I were to mention the name of Judas many of you would write down the word "betray" but not all of you. If I were to mention Simon Peter, some of you would write down the word "faith," but not all of you. If I were to mention the names of James and John, some of you would write down the phrase "Sons of Thunder," but not all of you. But when I mention the word Thomas, there is little question about the word most everyone would write down. It would be the word doubt. Indeed, so closely have we associated Thomas with this word, that we have coined a phrase to describe him: "Doubting Thomas".

You may be interested to know that in the first three gospels we are told absolutely nothing at all about Thomas. It is in John's Gospel that he emerges as a distinct personality, but even then there are only 155 words about him. There is not a lot about this disciple in the Bible but there is more than one description. When Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem the disciples thought that it would be certain death for all of them. Surprisingly, it was Thomas who said: Then let us go so that we may die with him. It was a courageous statement, yet we don't remember him for that.

We also fail to point out that in this story of Thomas' doubt we have the one place in the all the Gospels where the Divinity of Christ is bluntly and unequivocally stated. It is interesting, is it not, that the story that gives Thomas his infamous nickname, is the same story that has Thomas making an earth shattering confession of faith? Look at his confession, "My Lord, and my God." Not teacher. Not Lord. Not Messiah. But God! It is the only place where Jesus is called God without qualification of any kind. It is uttered with conviction as if Thomas was simply recognizing a fact, just as $2 + 2 = 4$, and the sun is in the sky. You are my Lord and my God!

These are certainly not the words of a doubter. Unfortunately history has remembered him for this scene where the resurrected Christ made an appearance to the disciples in a home in Jerusalem.

Thomas was not present and when he heard about the event he refused to believe it. Maybe he was the forerunner of modern day cynicism. Maybe the news simply sounded too good to be true. Thomas said: Unless I feel the nail prints in his hands I will not believe. Now I cannot help but notice that Thomas has separated himself from the disciples and therefore, in his solitude, missed the resurrection appearance. I think that John is suggesting to us that Christ appears most often within the community of believers that we call the church, and when we separate ourselves from the church we take a chance on missing his unique presence.

But the story doesn't end here. The second time Jesus made his appearance Thomas was present with the disciples and this time he too witnessed the event. This time he believed. What can we learn from the life of Thomas?

An Ohio grandfather was driving through Pennsylvania Dutch Country with his 7-year-old grandson. When they passed an Amish horse and buggy, the grandson was curious.

"Why do they use horses instead of cars?" he asked.

His grandfather explained that the Amish don't believe in automobiles.

After a few minutes, the boy said, "But can't they see them?"

Of course Amish people can see cars. They believe that cars exist, but they trust horses, they put their confidence in horses.

Diana Butler Bass says, "The point isn't that you believe in the resurrection. Any fool can believe in a resurrection from the dead. The point is that you trust in the resurrection. And that's much, much harder to do."

What Jesus asks of Thomas, and of us, is not that we weigh the evidence and make an intellectual choice to believe. Jesus is asking that we actively place our trust in the Risen One. (Rev. Kathy Donley)

In his book, *Ruthless Trust*, Brennan Manning wrote: "Anyone God uses is always deeply wounded. On the last day, Jesus will look us over not for medals, diplomas, or honors, but for scars."