

## “Courageous Thomas”

*John 11:8, 16, 40, 43-44, 14:1-6, 20:19-22, 24-31, 1 Peter 1:3-9, 5:10-11, Acts 4:32-35*

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**Prayer for Understanding** Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice, and open our minds to your wisdom. Amen.

The good news from John regarding Easter evening: **John 20:19-22, 24-31 NLT** “That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” Jesus said. As Jesus spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I am sending you.” Then Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. They told Thomas, “We have seen the Lord!” But Thomas replied, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them and place my hand into the wound in his side.” Eight days later the disciples were together again and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. “Peace be with you,” Jesus said. Then Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Do not be unbelieving any longer. Believe!” “My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed. Then Jesus told Thomas, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.” The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Jesus you will have life by the power of Jesus’ name.”

Why does human nature often label a person for a mistake rather than their goodness? Today’s sermon is entitled “Courageous Thomas”. Who first called him “Doubting Thomas”? We do not say “Denying Peter” or “Persecuting Paul”. God forgives all our mistakes and enhances every goodness.

Thomas only wants what everyone else has already received, a glimpse of Jesus resurrected. The word doubt does not appear anywhere in this scripture. The Greek expresses Jesus’ words as, “**Do not be unbelieving.**” Thomas is clearly a believer. Thomas is actively looking for God and following God. Thomas wants evidence of the resurrection, this amazing, world transforming event. Thomas is engaged in the push and pull of faith. Thomas is willing to question, wrestle, wait, watch, and hope.

Thomas has robust faith. Thomas does not grandstand like Peter. Watch me walk on water. Jesus you will never wash my feet. Nor does Thomas jockey for position like James and John who elbow each other out of the way to see who might sit at Jesus’ right hand. Thomas courageously puts love into action.

We see Thomas in the story of Lazarus. Jesus turns to go to Lazarus. **John 11:8, 16, 40, 43-44** “But Jesus’ disciples objected. “Rabbi, only a few days ago the people in Judea were trying to stone you. Thomas said to his fellow disciples, “Let us go, too and die with Jesus.” Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?” Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!”

We see Thomas actively engaged in Jesus’ preaching asking questions. Jesus was describing heaven as our home with space for each of us. Jesus said. **John 14:1-6 NLT** “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Parent’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going.” “No, we do not know, Lord,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus told Thomas, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Thomas’ question is vital if you actually care about following Jesus. You do not ask that question about the way unless you are striving to go where Jesus wants you to go.

When the resurrected Jesus appeared to several of the disciples. Thomas was out looking for Jesus as Jesus instructed. Mary reports that Jesus is risen and that they are to go and look for resurrection for they will see the resurrected Jesus. Thomas does not cower behind a locked door, quivering with the other disciples for fear of the religious authorities. Thomas, and the women, are the only ones brave enough to be on the outside.

The disciples go on to spread the good news and establish churches. Thomas has a special distinction. Thomas is the only one of the disciples to have ventured beyond the Roman empire to spread the good news of resurrection. Tradition tells us that Thomas established churches in southern India. Thomas is a courageous person of action, movement, and love. Let us go to Judea even if it means our death. I do not know the way Jesus. I want to know so tell me. I am not going to sit here with the door bolted. Jesus is alive. I am going to find Jesus. I am not going to be afraid. Thomas' courageous passion takes him all the way to India, further than any other disciple was willing to go.

Thomas was a "come to Jesus" person. "Come to Jesus" moments are times of decision. Think about what does a "come to Jesus" moment mean. Typically, it involves decisions to put one's belief in action. Decisions to love instead of fear, to be an ally rather than playing it safe. Decisions to serve, listen and help. Decisions to ask question, search and point out where God's resurrection is transforming.

The other scriptures assigned to today are from Acts and 1 Peter. Peter preached: **1 Peter 1:3-9 NLT "All praise to God, the Parent of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by God's great mercy that we have been born again into a living hope, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation and we have a priceless inheritance, an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by God's power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed for all to see. So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold, though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise, glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. You love God even though you have never seen God. Though you do not see God now, you trust God; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting God will be the salvation of your souls."**

Peter explains that when we decide to move from unbelieving to believing, we will rejoice with glorious, inexpressible joy. We will endure hardship, suffering, and grief, but all of these forms of death will end. Resurrection, love, and joy will endure, prevail, and be enjoyed forever.

Peter gives us a list of believing in God benefits: salvation, being born again, living hope, great expectations, guaranteed priceless inheritance kept safe for each person in heaven and wonderful joy. All of this results in expanding love which creates a glorious future.

Peter concludes: **1 Peter 5:10-11 "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to God's eternal glory in Christ, will restore, support, strengthen and establish you."**

Acts explains: **Acts 4:32-35 NLT "All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great blessing was upon them all. There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need."**

The church created an alternate system in which everyone's needs were taken care of. Everyone had enough. The church, you and I, are to be courageous in lifting up an alternate vision in which everyone is loved and has enough. Thomas models this robust, resurrection believing.

Notice Thomas does not say, unless I see Jesus walking around in a perfect body with a halo. Instead, Thomas said: "Unless I see the puncture wounds in the hands. Unless I see the split in Jesus' side. Unless I see that Jesus is a Jesus who suffered the depths of human pain and lived, then what is the point. Unless I see that Jesus is the one who goes to the heart of human suffering, taking all the pain on, then I have no use for him." That is the Jesus that is worthy of Thomas' believing. And the Jesus who is worthy of our believing. Amen

