

*Resurrection Revisits
Getting There...*
Rev. Dr. Meagan Boozer

Since Easter I've been keeping us in the Gospel of John, looking together at what happened with Jesus and the disciples after his resurrection. These are stories that some of us have heard hundreds of times, but for others of us, we are hearing them for the first time because we are new to the faith, or maybe we are hearing them for the first time because for the first time we are really listening.

So, let me recap just a bit. Jesus, the promised Savior of the world, the Son of God, and yet God himself (which is all quite mysterious and miraculous), Jesus was crucified between two common thieves because he was called a blasphemer. To blaspheme is to show contempt or lack of reverence to something considered sacred. On many occasions, Jesus claimed to be God, and this was considered blasphemy. If one of us stood up and claimed to be God, we would think you were joking. We would say, "Yeah right, sit down." But what if this person insisted, saying things that only God would say, making claims that only God would make and not backing down – and what if some of us started believing these claims – and started following this person around? Things could get difficult.

Well, that's what happened with Jesus – except on a much bigger scale. And the religious leaders of the day were beyond furious – calling him a blasphemer!! Claiming to be God! And so they arrested him, tried him unjustly, sentenced him to death, and crucified him by the roadside so people could walk by and hurl insults at him, spit on him, or just shake their heads and walk on as if he was nothing.

Jesus was crucified, a spear thrust in his side to make sure he was dead, brought down from the cross, wrapped in cloths, and taken to a donated tomb where he was laid. A large stone was rolled into place in front of the tomb and soldiers were stationed by the stone to guard it – to make sure no one got in and no one got out.

On the third day it was discovered that the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty! Jesus, the one who claimed to BE God, was raised from the dead! (So much for the guards!) And he appeared to Mary Magdalene, a woman Jesus had just about brought back from the dead herself because her life was such a mess when she met him. And then he appeared to his disciples who were afraid after everything that had happened and were behind locked doors. Jesus just appeared in the midst of them, speaking peace over them, and commissioning them with the Holy Spirit to take his peace out beyond their locked doors. (Picture a Pez. Those little candy pieces are God's peace. As his disciples we are possessors and dispensers of God's peace.)

Let's pick up where we left off last week in John 20:24-29. *"²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "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."* Let's stop here. First of all, we didn't know that Thomas wasn't with them when we read our text last week. But here it is. Thomas wasn't there. On the third day following Christ's crucifixion, the other 10 disciples were gathered together, without Thomas. There is no explanation for why he wasn't with them, but we can guess that he was so distraught over what had happened to Jesus that he didn't want to be with the others. He didn't want to be with anyone. He needed to grieve and process alone. Perhaps that is why he wasn't there. No one knows for sure. But in between that night and the next Sunday evening, Thomas was told what had happened in that locked room! *"We have seen the Lord!"* they told him. And Thomas replied, *"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."* ²⁶*A 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."* Now, a bit of a side note: It seems that the first

day of the week, meaning Sunday, was set apart for the disciples to gather together, and Jesus put his stamp of approval on it by appearing twice with them on that day. Historically it is indisputable that from this time, this is the day observed as the Lord's Day – the Christian Sabbath! That's why we are here, on a Sunday – because way back then – Jesus in all his resurrection power and glory established it as THE day to gather together and meet in his Name – because where 2 or 3 are gathered, there he is in the midst of them!

Let's continue. ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Let's compare what Jesus said to what Thomas said.

Thomas said, "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."

Jesus said, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Jesus knew exactly, and I mean exactly, what Thomas said he needed in order to believe. It's almost like he had been listening to what Thomas said to the others – the truth of which I'm sure was not lost on Thomas. ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

There is no indication that Thomas ever followed through on touching the nail prints and putting his hand into the wound in Jesus' side. When he saw Jesus, when he heard what he offered to him to help him believe, Thomas was convinced. Perhaps more convinced in this moment than any of the others. And his confession of faith, "My Lord and my God!" is exactly what Jesus was asking of Mary when he told her not to hold onto him because He had not yet ascended to the Father. Receive the total picture, Mary! See the reality of my full identity! And Thomas here gets it! He gets it! Jesus is the Lord over all things and Jesus really is God himself.

But don't miss this: Thomas said, "My Lord and my God." He made it personal, because it was personal. Jesus knew Thomas. He saw his grief, he heard his cry for help in order to believe, and he responded in a specifically personal way to Thomas. And then ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? And then Jesus says to us, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Thomas has gotten a bad rap for this moment. We remember him as 'doubting Thomas.' But without Thomas saying some of the things he said, without him asking some of the questions he asked, we would have so many more questions ourselves. It was Thomas who asked Jesus where he was going in John 14. Do you remember? John 14:1-7, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

All of us doubt from time to time. For some of us, we might be in a big moment of doubt right now. Does God really exist? Does God really hear me when I cry out to him? Does God really intervene in our lives? Does he really love me?

I think sometimes we put faith and doubt in opposite ends of the spectrum. But I think faith and apathy are more opposite than faith and doubt. To be apathetic about God is more concerning to me as a pastor than to have doubts about God. To be clear – to be apathetic about God is to not care, to not be at all concerned – it's a 'whatever' way of thinking.

But doubt – doubt is often a key part of our faith journey. Doubt pushes us to ask questions, like Thomas did. And we should ask questions. That's what our small groups are SO good for! We should be honest about the questions we have, and we should seek to find the

answers from people that we trust who have more than likely been through the same times of doubt that we are in. Those of you who are recently out of high school and have made your way into college or the work force or the military – you know the extreme challenge that a believer, a church-attender faces out there (not that you didn't face it in high school too – I know you did). Doubt can creep in or come rushing in when others are dissing you for your faith. But let's recognize this truth: Doubt is not a sign of weakness, but it is a sign that we are taking our relationship with God seriously enough that we are 'putting it all on the table,' trusting that someone will be able to come alongside us and help us get to a place of confidence in knowing what we believe.

Christian tradition holds that Thomas set sail for India and was the first to spread the news about Jesus there. His doubt, his desire to know Jesus for himself, in his own way, is what gave him a bold faith in Jesus Christ as Lord over his whole life, the one he went to for guidance, peace, correction, and strength to live as Jesus had lived, and doubt gave him an assured faith in Jesus as God himself, the one who is the everywhere present, all-powerful, and all-knowing One who created the world and everything in it. *"My Lord and my God."*

Recently I read a story about a woman in her 30's who one day had an overwhelming spiritual experience. She knew God was present, and she felt God calling her to do something new, something way out of her comfort zone in just about every way. But she felt God's presence so deeply that day that she couldn't deny it. It's sort of the kind of spiritual experience many people want. An 'a-ha!' moment. Clear marching orders. It's like Thomas being given the opportunity to see and touch.

This woman did go out, and for the next 50 years did amazing things in Jesus' name. But inside she still doubted. She wrestled with her faith. She had what Christian writers for centuries have called a 'dark night of the soul.' Sometimes she even questioned the existence of God. And this bothered her.

Some might have called her 'doubting Theresa,' but we know her as Mother Theresa, who gave her life to help the lowest and least in Calcutta (in India). She saw so much brokenness, so much sickness, so much hurt and pain and injustice. And so, she doubted. Where is God in all of this? Why do so many have to suffer?

We all doubt. We look at the news. We hear of Christians being murdered because of their profession of faith in Jesus and we wonder, "Why didn't God protect them?" We see so much suffering all over the world, people dying of hunger and from a need for clean water, and we wonder, "Why doesn't God provide what they need?" We see the suffering and sadness right here among us, and we wonder. It's okay to wonder. It's okay to doubt. It's okay to give up praying the same prayer you've been praying for 25 years because you don't see God doing anything you've hoped for. Thomas doubted. And we do too. There is no sin in that.

But let's learn from what Thomas did next. He didn't stay away from the others. He didn't sulk in the corner by himself for long. He didn't let the devil establish a foothold of doubt in him. He put himself in a place where he could see, he could hear, he could learn, he could grow, he could be encouraged and prayed for. He went back to the gathering of believers. Why? Because deep down he knew it was true. Deep down he had a longing in his soul to reconnect with the One who knew him inside and out. Even though he felt like being alone, he knew he needed to be with the others. And maybe, just maybe, he thought, Jesus would come again.

There is a really big story in the Bible about the parting of the Red Sea. Moses lifted his arms and the water separated, creating not just sand to walk across, but DRY sand! I wonder who went first. How did they make those first steps with literally walls of water standing on either side of the long pathway through? It must have been terrifying! The noise, the water, the unknown! But it was the only way. And so, they put one foot out, and then the other foot out, and they just kept walking and believing until they reached the other shore.

This is the way it is when we have doubts. We don't see the other shore yet. We're struggling. But God has done all the work. He is with you. He knows you inside and out. He knows what you need. He hears your cries. And so, alongside each other (some feeling strong

and sturdy in our faith and others feeling even weaker than we are), we put one foot in front of the other and together keep moving forward.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who do not see, and yet have come to believe." I'll take that blessing from my Lord and my God! How about you? Amen.

Take Another Step
by Stephen Curtis Chapman

Well the band was playing, the flags were waving, and there you were
In the middle of a sunny day parade
The crowds were cheering, the sky was clear, not a worry in the world
Marching on sure and steady, strong and straight
Take another step and another step and another step
Then the lightning flashed the thunder crashed
And suddenly, It began to rain and everybody ran
Then the sky went black as midnight, and you couldn't see
Paralyzed by what you just can't understand
And now here you are, You're afraid to move
You don't know where to go, You don't know what to do.
Take another step, take another step
When the road ahead is dark
And you don't know where to go
Take another step, take another step
Trust God and take another step
And another step and another step
Take another step and another step and another step

We walk by faith and not by sight we know it's true
We say it and sing it and love the way it sounds
But none of us can even begin to truly understand
What it really means 'til all the lights go out
And there we are nothing to hold on to
But the promises God's made to me and you
Take another step, take another step
When the road ahead is dark
And you don't know where to go
Take another step, take another step
Trust God and take another step

If there's an ocean in front of you
You know what you've gotta do
Take another step and another step
Maybe He'll turn the water into land
And maybe He'll take your hand and say
Let's take a walk on the waves
Will you trust Me either way and take another step

Take another step, Take another step
Trust God and take another step
When the road ahead is dark
And you don't know where to go
Take another step, Take another step
Trust God and take another step
And another step and another step
Take another step and another step and another step
Take another step and another step and another step
Take another step and another step and another step