

Declare the Resurrection of Jesus

[John 20:19-31](#)

Some of you may recall a television show known as the ABC Wide World of Sports (it may still be on the air, although it may not be ABC anymore). The opening credits of the show talked about ‘The Thrill of Victory’ and showed a team celebrating a significant milestone. Then you saw a skier coming down a steep slope and just before he takes off airborne at the end of the ramp, his feet and skis come out from under him and he takes a terrible fall off the end of the ramp – he is known as ‘The Agony of Defeat’.

I think some of us may see Thomas as embodying ‘The Agony of Defeat’ in that he is the one who voices considerable doubt about the resurrection of Christ.

I wonder what it would have been like to have been a disciple of Jesus during what is now referred to as Holy Week. I

can only imagine the sense of defeat when the disciples see Jesus die a horrible death, and at that moment, not understanding the plan and need for this sacrifice, give up all hope of a new kingdom on earth. I'm sure the disciples had high expectations of Jesus' role as Messiah and of their role as followers. Everything had changed within a week of a victorious return into Jerusalem. There can be no other description other than 'The Agony of Defeat'.

As Christians today, we have the benefit of hindsight vision. We know the ending and the outcome. We know that the suffering of Christ was part of God's plan in order to save all of us from sin and death. Christ had to take our place as the ultimate sacrifice. We also know that only through Christ can we be forgiven of our sin and be accepted into the kingdom of heaven. But from the disciples' perspective, things were not so clear at this point in the story.

Jesus had proven his ultimate victory over death, hell and the grave. He first appeared to Mary and then to the disciples, however Thomas was not with the group and missed out on the very first Easter celebration. When Thomas' friend and colleagues tell him the good news, Thomas takes on his most famous role of the ultimate doubter. He cannot comprehend the fact that in spite of witnessing countless miracles, Jesus could somehow conquer death. Thomas not only wants to see Jesus, he wants to touch his nail-scarred hands and his wounded side. He wants to believe beyond ANY doubt.

Is Thomas' doubt reasonable after going through such turmoil? Would any of us risk believing again? Are we not taught that to question authority is not only our right but our responsibility? Perhaps we too would have found doubt and despair easier and more realistic. If we take a closer look at Thomas, perhaps we can get a better idea of what brought him to

a point of such despair that he cannot accept the word of his friends.

Who was he? Thomas was most likely a fisherman as were a number of the other disciples. In John 21:2, Thomas joins Peter and some of the other disciples for an all night fishing event. This was not a pleasure trip, it was work. Its interesting that after Jesus died, Thomas and the others returned to what they knew, what was familiar. They went back to the way things were before they met Jesus even after witnessing Jesus' resurrection. Peter and John go out on another fishing expedition with several others including Thomas. It appears that even with Jesus' resurrection, the disciples no longer saw where they fit into the master plan.

Thomas made his choice to follow Jesus and be one of the 12. Thomas was the inquisitive one. When Thomas didn't understand something Jesus said, he asks questions. When Jesus

said he was going to prepare a place for his disciples and they would know the way to follow, Thomas voices the question, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Obviously Thomas was confused. However, Thomas was also dedicated to Jesus to the point of accepting the inevitable. In John 11:16, when Jesus insisted on returning to Judea to raise Lazarus from the dead, it was Thomas who said, “Let us go that we may die with Him.” These are the words from a loyal and dedicated follower.

So what happened? How could someone with such devotion and dedication give in to doubt and fear a short time later? Perhaps it is not so hard to imagine. Often we may see our own faith shaken to the core with a quick turn of the day. It seems easier to follow Jesus’ teachings when things are going well. It is much harder when the difficulties of work, family, health and finances begin to cloud our vision. J. David

Muskens, author of “Forty Days to a closer Walk with God”, describes a day when he and his wife were visiting his cousin in Washington State. They had planned to visit Mount Rainier which was visible from his cousin’s kitchen window. His cousin encouraged them on their trip saying, “today the mountain is out.” The mountain is always there but as it is often cloudy in that region, many times it is impossible to see. At times we may feel God is absent from us, hidden behind the clouds. God is always there but at times we may cloud the view with our doubts and fears.

When the authorities came to arrest Jesus, all of His disciples fled, including Thomas. For whatever reason, Thomas did not regroup with the others. We don’t know where Thomas spent his week, but in separating himself from the others in their most trying hour, Thomas missed the very first Easter. Jesus appears to his disciples and Thomas is not there to witness it.

I know at times we too chose to isolate ourselves from others and deal with our grief and pain in solitude. Perhaps we are so far in despair that we miss the blessings of fellowship and comfort from others and from God.

When the disciples share with Thomas that they had seen Jesus, Thomas is so far in despair that all he can respond with is doubt. He doesn't just want to see Jesus, he wants to feel His nail-scarred hands and place his hand in the pierced side. He wants undeniable proof that Jesus is alive. Because of his doubt and despair, Thomas spends another week in misery, continuing in his downward spiral.

Fear led to despair – despair led to denial

Just when it seems we would lose Thomas for good, Jesus appears again when Thomas is present.

Can you imagine how Thomas must have felt as Jesus approached him? It's obvious Jesus knows he deserted Him and

isolated himself from the other disciples. His guilt must have been overwhelming. But what did Jesus do? He did not condemn Thomas, but He also did not ignore Thomas' needs. He gave Thomas the proof he needed to profoundly proclaim, "My Lord and My God." All doubts dispense and suddenly Thomas can see clearly and rejoice with the others in the knowledge that Christ has risen indeed.

I think at any given time any of us could find ourselves in line with Thomas. Sometimes God seems so distant, and yet perhaps we are the one creating the distance. The story of Thomas teaches us several things. First, it is ok to ask questions and seek truth. Doubt is not a bad thing unless it causes you not to believe in the risen Christ. Second, fellowship with others can help us through our difficulties, doubts and fears and renew our strength in God. And third, God is always ready to establish, renew or continue a relationship with you. God's

grace is ever-present. God is ready to meet you wherever you are. Not as a distant being, but as a partner and friend in our daily lives.

As we close today, consider where you are in your spiritual walk – consider where we are as the body of Christ. We can truly celebrate the risen Christ as our guide, ready to walk side-by-side with us through the trials of life. Have we put our whole trust in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? Can we share that grace with others in our community? Only then can we state with confidence as Thomas did, “My Lord and My God”. Let us keep that kindled fire strong as we serve God and serve each other. Amen.