

IN THE THOMAS TIMES

JOHN 20:19-29

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Now when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"

Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

It was on a Good Friday, at a Baptist Church in a remote part of Bangladesh. The sanctuary was packed as a movie projector spun a spool of film from reel to reel. A missionary was showing, "The Jesus Film."

Little children sat on the floor, and in the aisles, and across the front of the church. The seats were stuffed with people. Folks several rows deep stood behind the benches on tiptoes - craning their necks to see the depiction of the greatest life ever lived.

As the crucifixion scene started, a hush fell over the room. Gasps of horror and gut-wrenching sobs were heard as the Bengalis watched the torture and execution of Jesus. The villagers were moved with emotion. They had just watched Jesus work miracles, show compassion, and forgive sin. Now they were trying to process the punishment of an innocent man.

Finally, at the peak of their consternation, a boy stood up in the crowded church, and shouted, "Don't be afraid. He gets up again! I saw it before." A small boy's encouraging cry gave hope to the viewers.

But the disciple named Thomas didn't hear that cry, *not at first*. He didn't see Jesus *after He got up again*.

Eight days earlier, on Sunday night, the risen Christ appeared to a roomful of disciples... *minus Thomas*. Where He was we don't know, but He was missing...

Jesus' appearance that night was the confirmation of what the women had reported earlier that morning.

Mary Magdalene was the first to bolt through their barricade, and shout the news that she had seen the risen Lord. Other women, and Peter, also saw Him.

Two disciples showed up saying they met Him on the Road to Emmaus...The disciples who huddled together in the upper room that day didn't know what to think when suddenly, without knocking on the bolted door, or without slipping through an open window, Jesus just appeared. He materialized in the middle of the room...

And it was obvious that He was no ghost or phantom. You couldn't see the wallpaper through His body. He was no mist or apparition. Jesus was solid.

He showed the disciples enough of what the Romans did to Him to assure them it was Him. They saw His hands and side. They could touch His scars.

Hey, Jesus was human flesh - as real as they were.

I'm sure when the risen Christ first appeared they were blinking and rubbing their eyes in astonishment, but when He left, they were convinced He was alive.

J. Vernon McGee was a radio Bible teacher. Once, a lady wrote him a question, "Our preacher said that Jesus just swooned on the cross and on Easter, the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think?" McGee replied, "Dear Sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip for 39 heavy strokes. Nail him to a cross. Hang him in the sun for six

hours. Run a spear through his heart. Embalm him. Put him in an airless tomb for three days. Then see what happens..."

The disciples had witnessed firsthand the cruel and ruthless brutality of the crucifixion. There were no doubts it had been lethal... And now, after a few moments with the risen Lord they were as sure of Jesus' resurrection as they had been of His death.

On Sunday night a roomful of disciples learned that Jesus *had gotten up again*. And He greeted them, "Shalom", or "Peace be with you." Then He told them to share the same encouraging message with others.

He imparted to them the Holy Spirit - and gave them authority to lead His infant church. Jesus had resurrected with Him the disciples' hopes and dreams. They were reborn. *Everyone that is, except Thomas.*

The followers of Jesus were ready to tell the world that their Master was alive, *and guess who their first target must've been?* You guessed it, Thomas. The Gospel of John reads in verse 25, "The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." Notice the verb "said" - it means "they kept on saying" to him.

For eight days his brothers-in-arms try to convince him of the resurrection. These men will win continents for Christ, but they can't persuade a single, solitary doubter. Thomas tells them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Thomas insists on the same kind of

proof Jesus provided the other disciples. He wants to confirm the resurrection with his own eyes and his own hands.

Thomas reminds me of Carl Sagan, the stargazing agnostic. He was a staunch spokesman for evolution and an opponent of Christianity. And when Sagan died, there were no about-faces or dramatic turn-arounds.

His wife said, "There was no deathbed conversion - no appeals to God, no hope for an afterlife, no pretending that he and I, who had been inseparable for twenty years, were not saying good-bye forever."

Someone asked her, "*Didn't Carl want to believe?*"

She replied, "Carl never wanted to believe. He wanted to know." This was the disciple named Thomas. He was slow to grasp faith. He wanted to know. He expected tangible proof and traceable evidence.

Over the centuries, Thomas has gotten the nickname, "doubting Thomas," but I don't like that designation. Thomas had the attitude, I want to know that I know beyond all doubt... Rather than tolerating a degree of doubt, Thomas wanted a faith that eliminated all doubt.

He wanted a faith untainted by the slightest twinge of skepticism, questions why, dilemmas, or hesitance.

Rather than a doubter, Thomas was more a pragmatist. Webster defines the word "pragmatism" as "the belief that the function of thought should guide action." In other words, think it through before you do.

Thomas had a logic-driven approach to life. He had to be able to add stuff up - figured it out beforehand.

It's interesting that the Roman Catholic Church has made Thomas the patron saint of architects, builders, geometers, construction workers, stonecutters, and surveyors - all professions that deal in exactness.

In the arts, Thomas is often portrayed with a builder's square in his hand. He was deliberate and cautious.

He had the opposite personality of impulsive Peter.

In John 14, we get an up-close look at Thomas.

Jesus is partaking of His last supper with His disciples, where He boldly promises them heaven. He says, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

And I'm sure Thomas was sitting there, thinking to Himself, "Lord, this promise of heaven sounds nice, but there's a lot here you're not telling us. I need more info if you want my heart to not be troubled. How about some drawings of heaven or maybe some dimensions? Where are the blueprints? And what about timetables and production schedules? A builder needs details."

I'm sure Thomas was biting his tongue until Jesus finally told them, "And where I go you know, and the way you know." That was too much for Thomas...

He had no idea where Jesus was going, or how He would get there. Thomas didn't know what Jesus was talking about,

and he was far too honest not to say so... Thomas finally blurts out what probably every other disciple was thinking, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"

And it was Thomas' honest question that prompted Jesus to follow up His cryptic comment with one of the clearest declarations of His identity in all of the Bible.

He says to all mankind in verse 6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me..." Jesus rewarded Thomas' honesty.

Thomas also shows His pragmatic personality in John 11 when Jesus heads for Lazarus' house.

Thomas knew Jesus had enemies in Bethany. *And He'd thought this through...* If Jesus goes, they'll all be walking right into the teeth of danger. Thomas is committed. He's ready to die with Jesus if necessary.

In verse 16 he tells the others, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." We'd say Thomas was a bit *pessimistic*, but he would probably tell us he's just being *realistic*. He's being honest with the situation.

To Thomas, all the signs indicated danger ahead.

Here's what can happen when a Christian gets overly pragmatic - he or she gets so caught up in the details of what could happen they miss out on what God wants to do. It's okay to put two and two together as long as you factor God into the equation before you sum it up. God may be planning what you don't expect!

Thomas had yet to learn that all of God's equations contain **a faith factor**. Christians aren't impractical, we just make allowances for God to do the unexpected.

It's ironic. Jesus told His disciples they were going to Bethany to raise a man from the dead, while the pragmatic Thomas worried about being put to death. **Pragmatism without faith always turns to pessimism.**

Interestingly, in the end, Thomas did die with Jesus.

Tradition has it that after Jesus' ascension, Thomas became one of the most active disciples. Again His pragmatism motivated him... *If this is life is nothing but preparation for the next, and if people without Jesus are dying and going to hell, and if we can truly do all things through Christ;* then why not charge out into unknown territories and share His good news?

Early church sources tell us Thomas shared the Gospel in Turkey, Babylon, Persia, India, **as far away as China. He was called "the apostle to the Orient."**

And Thomas used his construction mentality to build churches. There are Christians today in **Mylapore, India** who claim to be part of a church started by Thomas. They will even take you to his supposed burial site. **Their tradition says Thomas was martyred in 72 AD by an angry Hindu priest who thrust him through with a spear...** Thomas' pragmatism produced a brave heart.

But here's where our man, Thomas, stumbled - **he refused to believe unless he could see for sure.**

He was willing to follow Jesus regardless of danger, but He just wanted to move forward with no ambiguity. His commitment to Jesus required *total assurance*.

Thomas was the disciple who wanted a faith that answered all His questions about God - and life - and eternity. He wanted a neatly packaged faith.

Thomas was willing to follow Jesus anywhere, but only if every "T" was crossed and every "I" was dotted.

It's also ironic, that Thomas is considered the patron saint of theologians. Folks who sit in ivory towers and try to decipher God's ways have a special affinity for Thomas. They mistakenly hope, like Thomas did, to figure out a God who is simply wanting to be obeyed.

Thomas was slow to learn that faith is not the elimination of all doubt, but the willingness to trust and follow God in spite of our doubts and questions.

For it's true, *you don't always know that you know.*

I have questions about God to which I've never been given answers... There are passages in my Bible where I'd really like more information... My life has experienced unfair situations, where I pleaded for an explanation, and God stayed silent on the subject...

I've made decisions I thought were God's will, but in the end, I wondered if I'd really heard His voice...

As a Christian, I've come to terms with an uncomfortable truth. *If you are totally certain, it's not faith.* Dr. King once said, "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."

Norman Shirk attended Dallas Seminary in 1981. He wrote this poem... "Let me meet you on the mountain, Lord, just once. You wouldn't have to burn a whole bush. Just a few smoking branches and I would surely be **your Moses**... Let me meet you on the water, Lord, just once. It wouldn't have to be on White Rock Lake. Just on a puddle after the annual Dallas rain and I would surely be **your Peter**... Let me meet you on the road, Lord, just once. You wouldn't have to blind me on North Central Expressway. Just a few bright lights on the way to chapel, and I would surely be **your Paul**...

And let me meet you, Lord, just once... Anywhere, Anytime... Just meeting you in the Word is so hard sometimes... Must I always be... **your Thomas?**"

Every believer has a few *Thomas times*... when life gets confusing, and we feel unsure... when the will of God seems murky, and the future appears uncertain...

Once a British chap shared a railway compartment with two prim-and-proper-and-prudish-looking old ladies. These two spinsters were busy judging anybody and everybody. They obviously were so self-righteous.

Well, the conversation continued until the train passed through a long, dark tunnel. In the darkness, the man kissed the back of his hand noisily several times.

When the train came out of the tunnel and stopped at the nearby station, the man rose, tipped his hat, and in a gentlemanly way said, "May I thank whichever one of you two ladies I am indebted to, for the charming incident in the

tunnel...” He then rushed out, leaving the two ladies to fume in judgment over each other.

The moral of the story is that sometimes things happen in the dark that never get fully explained, and if we're not careful, we can jump to the wrong conclusions, even accuse God falsely... *At times, our desire to put two and two together can lead us astray.*

God, why was I not healed?

Why did I lose my job?

Why was I the victim?

God, why this? why that? I just don't understand!

Neither did Thomas. He wanted to see with His own eyes and touch with His own hands. He wanted to inspect Jesus' scars, and see for Himself, and get answers to all his questions, and remove all traces of doubt. The ultimate pragmatist wanted to eliminate the need for faith... **Thomas wanted to know for sure!**

Salome also wanted to know... The mother of James and John wanted some assurance as to where her sons stood with Jesus. After all, they sacrificed so much to leave all and follow Him. Salome felt she had the right to ask Jesus if her boys could sit at His right hand, and on His left, when He entered into His kingdom.

In Matthew 20, the Lord answers Salome, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” Jesus was speaking of His death on the cross... **Now**

fast-forward several days, and watch Salome at the foot of His cross...

Two other men, on Jesus' right hand, and on His left, are nailed to crosses like Jesus. And Salome hears one of the men say, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Then she hears Jesus answer him, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise."

And it suddenly hits Salome... *what if I had gotten my request - if I'd gotten what I thought I wanted* - It would be my sons on the two crosses next to Jesus. Sometimes we make requests of God, and we aren't ready for the answers. If God gave us what we said we wanted, it would destroy us rather than strengthen us.

Professional golfer, Tommy Bolt, was playing in a tournament in LA where he was paired with a caddy known for his constant chatter. Bolt had a reputation for hot-headedness and a lack of patience... Before the first tee, the golfer told the caddy not to say a word. He said, "If I ask you something just answer yes or no."

On one of the holes, Bolt was trying to figure out how to hit his shot around a tree, over a lake, and onto the green. He asked his caddy, "What do you think - a 5 iron?" The caddy responded, "No." Well, Bolt was insulted, "You don't think I can reach it with a 5 iron? Watch this shot..." The caddy rolled his eyes, "No."

Bolt hit his 5 iron. The ball dropped two feet from the cup. He spun around, and shouted at his caddy, "What do you think of that golf shot? Now with permission to speak, the caddy said, "Mr. Bolt, that wasn't your ball."

Sometimes when God lets us have our way, it gets us into deep trouble. We don't always know as much as we think we do. And God is willing to humble us.

I think it's interesting that Jesus left Thomas in the dark for 8 days to struggle and grapple with his faith.

I can hear the other disciples scolding Thomas, "Why be so stubborn and arrogant? Why do you have to always see to believe? Don't you have any faith?"

Finally, on the 8th day after His resurrection, with the disciples still cooped up in the upper room, Jesus returned... and this time Thomas was present...

It's one of those scenes in the Bible where you wish you could go back in time, and experience it firsthand.

The risen Lord approaches a trembling Thomas, and says to him, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side." You wonder if Jesus grabbed Thomas by the hand, and guided his finger toward his wounds; as He challenged him, "Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

It's not reported whether Thomas actually touched the scars. Something tells me by this point he didn't need to touch or see. The next line reads, "Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

For eight days, Thomas had been entrenched in his stubbornness, refusing to draw a conclusion based solely on faith. Now, He realizes that the other disciple's faith had been more *real* than His *realism*. He's now ashamed of his pragmatism, and bows to the obvious.

Did you hear of the pastor's son who got tired of the pandemic protocols, especially his mother's insistence on him washing his hands? She was constantly warning her little boy about germs. *"Johnny, wash your hands!"*

Finally, one day the little guy shouted back, *"Germs and Jesus. Germs and Jesus. That's all I ever hear, and I've never seen either one of them."*

That sounded like Thomas for a time. But when he finally saw Jesus with His own eyes - and saw the Savior's scars - he realized for the first time he didn't need to see. *Rather than probe the wounds, and ask the whys...* Thomas fell on His face and worshipped!

Here's what I think happened... when Thomas saw the holes in Jesus' hands and feet where the nails had been driven and the open wound below His ribs where the spear had been thrust into Jesus' side... it dawned on Thomas just how much he was loved by Jesus.

All His questions why... all of His scrutinizing... all His pragmatic assumptions... all His putting two and two together... none of that mattered anymore...

Thomas realized that He was loved. As Jesus had said to all His disciples, *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."*

Thomas finally realized that whatever had happened in the past, and could happen in the future, it was overseen by a good and loving God who cared enough about him to die in his place and return from the dead.

Thus, from that day forward, it wasn't answers, or reasons, or explanations that brought Thomas peace and comfort, it was the remembrance of those scars.

It was **love, not logic** that answered Thomas' questions and silenced his doubts. Here's the factor that should be inserted into all life's equations - two plus two, plus "X" - **the cross** - is what equals love.

Pope Gregory once commented, "The disbelief of Thomas has done more for the Christian faith than the faith of the other disciples." Thomas was the initial exception that proved the rule for the rest of us...

For Jesus explains in verse 29, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The "blessed" or "happy" people are those who have learned that they don't need all their doubts resolved, and all their questions answered to believe in Jesus.

Verse 29 doesn't say, "*Happy are those who see. Happy are those who know. Happy are those who understand.*" Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed (or happy) are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

When you get to heaven and finally see for yourself, like Thomas, you won't be talking about the answers God gave to your questions. You'll be enamored by those scars, and the love that they communicate...

You too will fully surrender, "My Lord and my God."

True faith can live with a few uncertainties, and mystery, and ambiguity, and a limited vantage point as long as it remembers the scars that prove His love.

We all have our Thomas times when we're faced with doubt, but just don't turn your back on His scars.

I have placed my life into God's hands, not because He's responded to all my whys, or satisfied all my arguments, or eliminated all my quandaries, or even informed me of all the details... *but because my life is directed and protected by hands that bear the marks, the evidence, of a love greater than I can imagine!*

Nail holes in resurrected hands - wounds in an incorruptible body - are what speak to me of God's love and grace. His scars signal the extremes Jesus went to save, and forgive, and provide for you and me. The scars of Jesus are all the answers real faith requires.

Job was a man like Thomas who had honest doubts, but in the end, Job had to face his own limitations...

William Safire writes this of Job, "Having succeeded in making direct contact with his Creator, (Job) reacts to God's awesome rebuke by putting his hand over his mouth and accepting the limits of his knowledge."

Thomas also accepted the limits of his logic. But he found in Jesus' nail-scarred hands God's limitless love.

Here's for all the Thomas' in the crowd today... Don't assume that honest doubts, and unanswered questions, disqualify you from meeting the risen Christ.

Jesus doesn't back off from a faith that's *a work in progress*. He's not intimidated by a pragmatic personality. He just wants

us to admit the limits of our logic - that none of us have all the answers.

Until the day we die, we'll never get it all figure out, but that shouldn't keep us from drawing close to His wounded side and holding fast to His nail-scarred hands - and receiving the mercy and comfort He gives.

Like Thomas, surrender your life today to the risen Christ and declare Him to be your Lord and your God!

Let me close by pointing out a detail in verse 24. Our text today began with these words, "Now Thomas, called the Twin..." The word "Thomas" means "twin."

But who was Thomas' twin? We don't know. *Unless it's you!* Unless you are a gotta-know kind of person.

Some of us have asked so many questions - we've tried to decipher so many complexed issues - that we've forgotten the first lesson we learned on the first day of Sunday School, "Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." And that's the truth every Thomas, and his twin, really needs, to know Jesus.

The next time you're facing a perplexing situation, and you have no idea what God is up to - *remember what you do know* - remember the cross, remember His scars, remember the risen Lord who appears to people who long for the *Who* even more than the *why*.

When your circumstances don't make sense, remember that neither do His scars... *What did we ever do to warrant that kind of love from Almighty God?*

Cross-examine your situation. View it through the lens of Calvary's cross and the empty tomb. When logic fails, trust in His love... *for the sake of His scars.*