

Doubting Thomas

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[0:00] I wondered what those disciples as they sat in a locked room might have been thinking. And I wonder if it might have been something like this. Bear with me for a moment. It's been a rather strange few days for us. We were in that garden with Jesus. But then Judas brought all these soldiers and religious people to take Jesus, to arrest him. How could Judas betray our Lord? We all wandered off while he was taken away and put on trial. Of course he'd not done anything wrong. We knew that. But they'd been out to get him for a long time.

I guess what was happening was inevitable. It was always going to happen. They ended up managing to arrange his crucifixion. It's a horrible way to die. But now he's dead. It had been an amazing year. These last few years following Jesus, we'd seen him walk on water. We saw him feed 5,000 odd people. We saw him heal the sick, cast demons out. He even raised Lazarus back to life. But I guess all good things come to an end, don't they? What are we going to do now? I don't know. Me and the other disciples were in this room. We're afraid. Maybe the Jewish leaders, they want us too. Apparently Mary's seen him and Peter and John, they saw the empty tomb.

But who knows what's going on? We're upset. We're confused. We're scared. Verse 19, we join those disciples on that first Easter Sunday evening. We're here on Easter Sunday evening today. Verse 19, it says, on the evening of that first day of the week when the disciples were together with the doors locked for the fear of the Jewish leaders. They were afraid.

They were fearful people. It's understandable that they were afraid as we saw this morning. Dead people don't rise again, do they? This is not what they were expecting Jesus to be risen.

[2:37] And they were afraid that the ones who put Jesus to death might put his followers to death too. And so suddenly someone does appear in the room, but it's not the Jewish leaders.

Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you. After he said this, he showed them his hands and his sides.

The first thing we see this evening is peace for fearful men. They were locked in a room. They were in fear. There wasn't much peace in them.

And Jesus walks in and he says, peace be with you. Remember what Jesus said in chapter 14, verse 27.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled.

[3:53] And do not be afraid. And Jesus now stands in the room with his disciples whose hearts are troubled and whose hearts are afraid.

And he offers them his peace, his extraordinary peace, unlike any peace this world can give us. Peace only found in him.

And then he shows them his wounds from the cross where the nails had been in his hands and in his sides.

By his wounds we have peace. Because the one standing in front of them had died in their place. Died for sinful, died for fearful people.

There is standing with them someone who gives peace. Like no one else can give. Peace with God.

[5:02] Peace knowing sins are forgiven. I was thinking about how the world might find peace.

I was thinking of people who go off to try and find themselves, trying to find a sense of peace. I even googled how to find peace. And according to the internet, found ten things.

I'm going to share with you just five. Spend time in nature. I understand that. It is peaceful out up on the downs. Meditate.

Do a bit of yoga or something. Be grateful. Yeah, it's good to be grateful, isn't it? Love yourself. Declutter.

Many of you know I work up on the mez floor and it probably needs much more decluttering. But I tidied it up the other week. And you know what? I actually felt quite at peace.

[6:01] I actually could think more clearly. It did kind of work. But the Bible shows us that there is someone who can give us peace.

And it's not found in us. It's not found in decluttering our room. It's a load of rubbish in many ways. No, we need to look away from ourself and we need to look to the one who's risen from the dead. The Lord Jesus who shows us his wounds. By those wounds we have peace. Peace with God. And those disciples who sat in that room full of fear.

As Jesus stands with them and says, peace be with you and shows them his wounds. We see in verse 20 that they're not fearful anymore. It tells us that the disciples felt something different.

I wonder, can anyone spot it? There's not many of us here tonight. Can anyone spot what they're feeling now in verse 20? Bethany. Overjoyed.

[7:16] They were fearful. Now they're full of joy. The mood has changed in just a few verses because Jesus has come and the risen Jesus truly does change everything.

Just like Mary who we saw this morning who was full of tears. And she had her tears turned to joy, didn't she, as she saw Jesus.

The risen Jesus transforms our lives. We see secondly that Jesus sends his fearful disciples. What happens in the next few verses, quite honestly, I think they're a bit weird when you read them. But we'll try and make some sense of them for ourselves.

Verse 21. Again, Jesus said, peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that, he breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit.

[8:28] If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. There's some strange things here.

We'll think about them in a moment. It's strange that he kind of breathes on them. It's strange that he says, receive the Holy Spirit. We know our Bibles.

We know Acts 2 is when the Spirit comes upon the church. And then to round it all off, Jesus says, if you forgive sins, they're forgiven.

If you do not forgive them, they're not forgiven. What's going on here? We'll think about it in the next few moments.

But know that what is happening, for sure, is that Jesus is transforming these fearful disciples, isn't he?

[9:27] Jesus, who they knew had died, who they knew had been buried, is now with them. That's a life-transforming experience. And Jesus is now sending them.

Sending them to go and carry on his mission in the world. To go and say, like Mary told them, I have seen the Lord. I have seen the risen one.

Because when something transforms your life, you want to speak about it. And Jesus is equipping them in this room to do that. Hot cross buns are one of my other favorite things.

Other than Easter eggs, hot cross buns are the other one. At Easter, love hot cross buns. They're sweet and fruity and delicious. But this week, my hot cross bun experience has been transformed. I have discovered extremely cheesy hot cross buns in M&S.; It's so good. I can have a whole meal based around hot cross buns.

[10:36] I can have the savory and I can have the sweet. And it truly is life-transforming. And I told a couple of people about this the other day. About this hot cross bun transformation.

You can't help but speak about something if it transforms your life. And for these guys, these disciples, these fearful, once fearful disciples in this room.

Now overjoyed with seeing the risen Jesus. He wants to make sure that they truly do go off and speak about him. Speak about the one who can transform people's lives.

He says to them in verse 21, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that, he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit.

All three persons of the Trinity are here. I love it when we kind of spot those kind of things in the Bible. The Father has sent the Son. So the Son sends the Spirit.

[11:41] Sends them and sends the Holy Spirit to be with them. But as I said, some of these things in these verses just seem a little bit odd. Well, what's happening?

The Spirit, as we read in Acts 2, that's when the Spirit seems to come upon God's people, the church. But the Spirit has been at work since the beginning of time.

We read about him kind of hovering on the surface of the deep, or whatever it says in Genesis 1. And the Spirit is at work in the Old Testament, equipping people for certain tasks.

So when King David is anointed by Samuel, we read that the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. And here, though, the disciples do need to wait until Acts 2.

I think this is a kind of preparation for them to receive the Holy Spirit. I think that's what's going on here. But whatever is going on, it's very clear that these disciples do need the Spirit to be at work in them.

[12:55] They're a fearful bunch of people. On their own, they're kind of pretty unprepared. But they need the Spirit to be with them, helping them.

As we've been encouraged, when we looked at the last few chapters of John, the Spirit comes, and he's going to come, and he's going to live inside them. And he's going to help them to speak about this amazing news, this life-transforming news, that Jesus has risen again to new life.

And as part of that, they're going to speak the gospel message to people. And Jesus says this, if you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

As they speak to people the gospel, they're speaking to people of the one who can forgive sins, which is surely God alone.

But as that happens, as people come to new life, they can either turn to Jesus as Savior and find in him their sins forgiven, or reject him and find that their sins aren't forgiven.

[14:10] And if someone comes and knows Jesus for themselves, these disciples can assure them that, yeah, you've had your sins forgiven.

You've turned to Jesus and found that. It's simply the task, I think, of preaching the gospel, the good news of Jesus to people.

If someone was to come in this evening and give their testimony and tell us of how they came to know Jesus, I guess we could say with good assurance that they've had their sins forgiven.

They seem like God has really been working in them, and they know forgiveness of their sins. It's speaking the gospel and seeing God at work.

That's what he's telling them to do, equipping them to do. That's the task that is ahead for them, to carry on Jesus' mission in this world.

[15:21] But in all this excitement of Jesus standing in the room and being with his disciples, there's someone missing. What about Thomas?

Where is he? Because he's missing. He's not in the room. Thomas hasn't been around. It says that in verse 24. Now, Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

We don't really know why Thomas hasn't been around. I kind of wonder whether he might have thought, well, that's it. Jesus is gone. Go the British way.

And what would you reckon, our summer? He was buying the hot cross buns. Thank you. Maybe. I was thinking he just keeps calm and carries on and maybe carries on and buys hot cross buns,

according to our summer. That's not the word of the Lord. But the other disciples, and you can imagine this, as they've seen the excitement of seeing the risen Jesus.

[16:32] They come up to Thomas and say, we have seen the Lord, Thomas. You missed him. Where were you? We've seen the Lord. And Thomas doesn't believe.

We know this, Thomas, is doubting Thomas, don't we? The other disciples see the Lord. But he says, unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where those nails were, in his wounds, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

It's a little bit gross. He wants to touch Jesus' wounds. It's a little bit odd. But that's kind of the Thomas test, to see if Jesus really is real.

But if Jesus is real, I want him to stand in front of me, and I want him to show me his hands.

Show me that that is him. That is him who's actually died on the cross. I want to touch them. I want to touch and see, is he really physically there?

[17:50] Unless that happens, I'm not going to believe. A couple of years ago, I got to go to Wimbledon to see some tennis.

It was the COVID year. You could buy tickets online. You didn't have to queue up. So me and a housemate, we got some tickets online to be on the grounds courts to watch some tennis for the day.

It was a pretty good day. And during the day, in between a couple of matches, I was walking around. My housemate had got a drink, and I saw lots of people outside Centre Court, the big, big court at Wimbledon.

Lots of people just gathered around the entrance, and I was like, oh, what's going on here? So I thought, well, maybe something exciting is about to happen. And so I stood and waited there for about, felt like ages, it was probably like 10 minutes, and gave up and went to the loo.

Came out, and my housemate said, you've just missed Kate. I was like, Kate who? Kate? The Duchess of Cambridge Kate.

[19:00] William and Kate. That Kate. Really? I don't believe it. You're winding me up. And he showed me a video, and I'd have liked to have said, unless I see, it would have been better for this illustration if I told him, unless I see Kate standing in front of me, I just will not believe.

But that's not what I said. But I certainly didn't believe him until he showed me a video. And then I saw her, and I was like, oh, yeah, that was her. Oh, no.

I should have waited just a bit longer. I'd have seen her. Thomas here really doubts, really doubts that they could have possibly seen Jesus.

After all, a few hours ago, they were in a room. They were afraid. Maybe cabin fever is setting, and they've gone a bit delusional. And so they're trying to make themselves feel better, trying to make Thomas feel better.

And maybe there are many people that we know and love who don't yet believe in Jesus, and they don't believe in Jesus because they're like Thomas, and they doubt.

[20:16] And maybe that's even one of you here tonight. Maybe they're waiting for a sign to come. Maybe they're waiting for Jesus just to stand in front of them for 10 seconds, and they'll believe.

Or maybe they'll be praying at nighttime and say, Lord, if you just send a shooting star in front of me, they'll not believe. They're waiting for that kind of sign.

But the Bible shows us very clearly that we have everything we need to believe in Jesus. Verse 30. Jesus performed many signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name. John's gospel.

John says at the end that many other things could have been recorded here, but what is it in here is enough for someone to come and believe, to come and have life in his name.

[21:27] I think that can give us confidence as we share with people about Jesus, as we think about inviting them to church. We have enough.

We have all we need in the Bible for someone to come and believe in Jesus for themselves. This Bible is a reliable book.

This Bible is a reliable book. And when people are exploring facts and history about things that have happened, they'll look at eyewitnesses.

And this chapter is full of eyewitness testimony. We saw Peter and John. They saw. They saw the empty tomb. John saw and believed.

Mary, she saw the risen Jesus. These disciples, we have seen the Lord. And graciously, God has even given us someone who doubts in this chapter, so that anybody who may doubt in the Lord

Jesus, maybe they could read this and see that they're not alone.

[22:35] They're not alone in their doubts. And yet, Thomas, we've left him that test, that test of seeing Jesus in front of him.

What happens? Verse 26. A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with ye.

Jesus came and said to Thomas, Put your finger here.

See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe. Believe.

Jesus appears to Thomas, to Thomas the doubter.

And he's very, very gracious to Thomas. He stands there and says, You know how you said a week ago you wanted to see my hands and the wounds and you wanted to put your finger in them?

[23:48] Well, here I am. I am standing in front of you. I am standing in front of you. It is me. I am risen again.

He's showing them those wounds from the cross, those wounds which can bring Thomas peace with God. He's showing that to Thomas.

He offers that to him, the doubter. And so Jesus says to Thomas, Stop doubting and believe. It's really me.

And here comes the best bit, I think, of this encounter. Verse 28. Thomas said to him, My Lord and my God.

He doubted. He doubted, but now, now he believes. Wow.

[24:47] This is you, Jesus. Wow. He's amazed. He really has risen from the dead.

For as long as I can remember, I've said elephants are my favorite animal. And yet I hadn't seen any in real life.

A friend of mine found this out. And he said, We've got to change this. So he drove us up to Whipsnade Zoo. It was about 40 minutes from where we lived at the time.

And on the drive there, I said to him, I am really worried. I keep saying elephants are my favorite animal, but what if they're actually not?

I really doubted that I'd actually really love them. I thought maybe I've just overhyped it in my mind. They're not. I'm going to be so disappointed. They're not all they seem at all.

[25:49] So we had the day out together at Whipsnade Zoo. He purposely plotted a route to make sure we wouldn't see them till the end. But you know what? I still remember the moment of seeing the elephant.

He said to me, Daniel, turn around. I turned around and there in the distance, I saw an elephant. And my jaw fell down, jaw-dropping moment.

I was like, This is actually amazing. This is actually stunning. Wow. And I wonder if that was similar for Thomas. As he saw Jesus, who he doubted could have possibly risen from the dead.

And I was just like, Wow. My Lord and my God. Wow. It's him. It's Jesus. He really has risen. Notice that Thomas doesn't just say, Lord and God.

No, he says, My Lord and my God. Not the Lord, the God. My Lord and my God. See, when we stop doubting and come to believe in Jesus, we can call him mine.

[27:08] We know him for ourselves. We get to share in his life-giving work. And we gladly say, He is Lord of my life.

He has risen again. I'm going to follow him. He is my God. I get to know God. Because of what he's done. Because of the wounds in his hands and his side.

I know peace with God. I know life in his name. Though none of us have seen Jesus stand directly in front of us like Thomas.

Nonetheless, Jesus speaks to us in this passage. Verse 29.

Jesus told them, Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed. It's almost like Jesus turns away from the action.

[28:18] Turns to the camera and says to us, Blessed are those who have not seen him and yet have believed. And that's all of us this evening who believe in Jesus.

We are so, so blessed. So blessed with knowing life from the risen Jesus. Peter, one of the other apostles, wrote this.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. And Jesus said, Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

We haven't seen him. But because we believe in him, we're filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. As we know life, as we know peace from the risen Savior.

[29:31] And this truly did change Thomas' life forever. So, kind of legend has it, Thomas went off to India, to the gospel there, and he was even killed for doing so.

I don't think someone who doubts would do that, but he knew, he knew with great certainty, Jesus was risen. And so he would be very happy to give up his life for Jesus if he needed to.

We're going to sing again.

Um You