

Believing Thomas

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Date: 24 April 2022

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] Good morning.

Good morning. It's an honor to have our Archdeacon with us this morning, watching with us.

It's a surprise, but you all are very familiar with Venerable Joe Grigg and his wife Carolyn. We are so honored and grateful that you were able to worship with us on this Lord's Day.

The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed. Hallelujah. Very well. Our gospel text this morning is John 20, verse 19 to 31.

We'll be mostly focusing on the second half of that story. The story of Thomas, the apostle, and his doubt and his belief.

[1:14] So the latter part of that is what we'll be focusing on. But we will be referring to the earlier part as well, briefly. Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God.

We thank you for your resurrection. We thank you, Lord, that it is the stamp of God and vindication of God for your work of salvation on our behalf.

And because you are risen and ascended, Lord, we also have hope, a hope that cannot be quenched, that we will one day be with you, our Lord, to reign for eternity.

Help us now as we study your word. Give us ears to hear. Help me, Lord, to speak rightly and truthfully your word. And help us all to leave here encouraged and determined to be more like Jesus, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Now, most of you are probably well familiar with this account of Apostle Thomas in our Gospel reading today.

[2:22] We have here Thomas' refusal. It was pretty adamant, wasn't it? It's an abject refusal to believe his fellow apostles, their testimony of the resurrection.

And this refusal to believe has led to him being known as doubting Thomas.

Right? Everyone usually put that adjective in front of his name. It's common. And it's come to actually mean, you know, to stand for doubt.

But I think it's unfortunate that we've ascribed this adjective to his name. When in fact, I think in this story, the opposite is true.

Although this might not be a popular opinion, I think Thomas should be known as believing Thomas rather than doubting Thomas.

[3:23] In fact, I think John's purpose in writing about this account is to show us the right response to the news of the resurrection.

Too often, we focus on Thomas' skepticism. And we fail to dwell on his amazing words of belief.

His amazing words of belief in the person and walk of Christ. These five words that he uttered. My Lord and my God. Those five words should be the right and proper response of every believer.

It is the essential response of everyone who comes to Jesus for saving. Now, first I want us to think about the nature of faith this morning.

In the secular age that we live in, to be a person of faith is to abandon reason and rationality. Most people in the secular world think that all of you Christians will gather here this morning.

[4:29] You know, you've done that in exclusion to your rational faculties. You're brainwashed. Now, it's not exclusive to Christianity alone.

Most people in the secular and atheistic worldview, that's the way they think about religion as a whole. Many of them will agree with Marx. That religion is the opium of the people.

But that may be true of other religions. But it isn't so with Christianity. I say this because faith in the God of the Bible is not blind faith.

Which, the blind faith says that you must accept something without evidence to back it up. The Bible doesn't ask you to accept something without evidence to back it up. Faith in the God of the

Bible is not unreasonable faith.

Which says that you must believe in something in spite of evidence to the contrary. That's not what the Bible calls us to when it calls us to trust in Jesus Christ.

[5:32] We are invited to believe in Jesus Christ as God, as Savior, as Redeemer and Lord. Because it is the most reasonable conclusion based on the evidence that exists.

The call to faith in Jesus Christ is not a call to a blind leap in the dark. It is a call to have your eyes open, examine the evidence, and then come to faith and trust in God.

And that's what you see when you read the Gospel accounts of the resurrection of our Lord. You see, as we saw last week, you see a bunch of skeptics and unbelievers who came to faith and assurance in the person of Jesus Christ based on the evidence before them.

Remember that none of the apostles believed either when the women came and told them about the resurrection. So Thomas isn't unique in his unbelief. But when they saw the evidence, they came to faith.

Even the closest disciples of our Lord were first skeptics of the resurrection. Although Jesus told them, and had been telling them, that he would be killed and on the third day rise from the dead.

[6:51] And they should have believed his word. And even though he has shown them he has power over death. When he raised Lazarus, who has been dead three days prior.

But we might forgive them because the resurrection of which Jesus spoke of has never happened in all of human history. That is the point of the resurrection.

It isn't something, it is unique, and it is, it is, it is, it is miraculous, and it is worthy for us to trust him because it's not something, it is the act of God. It isn't something, people don't rise from the dead.

People will say, yes, well yeah, that's the point. People don't rise from the dead. But Jesus rose from the dead. That's why it's different. That's why it's unique. That is the point of the resurrection.

People don't rise from the kind of death that our Lord suffered, a gruesome death, like that of the crucifixion. But, these skeptics, these first believers, upon seeing the evidence with their very eyes, these same cowering, fearful men and women, empowered now by the Holy Spirit, will stake their fortunes and their very lives on the truth of the resurrection.

[8:16] That is why I am so grateful for the inclusion of this story about Thomas in our gospel. We are not told why he was not with the other ten apostles when Jesus first appeared to them on resurrection evening.

But remember now that there were only ten left. Judas, the son of perdition, was already dead. So, Jesus, on the first evening of the resurrection, appeared earlier in our gospel reading last week in Luke.

He had first appeared to the women. The women had gone and told the apostles. The apostles didn't believe. And Peter and John came to the tomb, saw that it was indeed empty. And that evening, this is what John is telling us here in his account, that evening, the Lord Jesus appeared to ten of his apostles in the room where they were hiding.

Thomas was not with them. In defense of Thomas, he was, we ought to, we don't know why he wasn't there when Jesus appeared, but in his defense, what he was asking for was the same proof that the other ten apostles had.

Notice though, notice this, that he not only asked for a tangible sign, he was so adamant about it, that he asked for a tangible and personal one as well, a personal sign.

[9:41] He said, unless I see in his hands with my eyes the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

But the faith required to believe, here, according to Thomas that he's insisting on, is a reasonable faith. He says, I don't want to take a leap in the dark. But the Bible does not call us to take a leap in the dark.

It calls us to examine the evidence. And so, here was a man in search of evidence. We shall see, what we, what we ought to see about Thomas though, is whether he saw the evidence and came to faith.

When he encountered Jesus, did he cry like the man earlier in the Bible, I believe, help my unbelief. Or was he like one of the Pharisees asking to see signs, even after Jesus has already shown numerous signs to them.

Thomas is one who is searching for truth. Sometimes, I think we can observe the difference between these two kinds of unbelievers, right? The person who is really searching, looking to find

God.

[10:55] And those who are just obstinate in their, in their unbelief. They've seen the signs, but they're like the Pharisees after Jesus already fed, fed thousands before them saying, give us signs.

You've just seen signs. Sometimes, but we ought to observe the difference between these two kinds of unbelievers. Of course, it's really not ours, though, to decide. Even as we observe the differences, it's not ours to decide ultimately who is in which camp.

To do so, to try to say, oh yeah, those people are beyond hope, they're just obstinate. To do so is to limit God who can turn a terrorist like Saul into Paul the apostle.

And the Bible's witness is that God welcomes those who are searching for him. Right? So, the point of this is do not give up hope and do not give up being persistent in proclaiming the gospel.

Even to that person you think, man, this person has heard and seen the signs and they're still remaining in unbelief. It is God who changes hearts and turns hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

[12:08] Ours is to obey in proclamation of the gospel. Because it is God who says, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives. This is our God. He's willing to reveal himself to those who are looking and searching for him. This God is not willing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance and forgiveness of their sins.

God is not a capricious or vengeful God. Rather, he is a patient and merciful one. Willing and wishing that all will come to repentance.

So we see here that Thomas is a man looking for evidences. So eight days later, on the next Sunday, we're told, Thomas was with the rest of the disciples still in that room where they were hiding from the Jews, from the Jewish authority.

And Jesus again, appeared among them. And Jesus again said for the third time now, peace be with you. Shalom aleichem.

[13:16] Now, that is a common greeting still today in Israel, in Hebrew, even to this day. But this third time that Jesus uttered this word to his disciples, this word from our Lord's mouth is not just mere greeting at this point.

peace be with you. It's not a greeting, but a declaration. It is a declaration that by the cross, he is finished making peace with God on our behalf.

Through his atoning and substitutionary death, we have peace with God. And he's declaring it to his disciples. Now, he appears now before the eleven and he said to Thomas, since he is God after all, from whom no secrets are hid, he knows Thomas' statements earlier, even though he wasn't there.

He says to Thomas, he challenged him to touch the marks of the nails in his hands and the mark of his spear-pierced side. And he says to Thomas, do not be an unbeliever, but a believer.

That's the best paraphrase, I think, of the original Greek there. It's don't or stop being, stop persisting in your unbelief, but believe.

[14:37] This statement of our Lord to Thomas is but a command and a warning, both for Thomas and for you and I. It is not enough to believe in the Jesus who died on the cross.

Thomas believed in the Jesus who died on the cross. He was witness to his suffering and his death on the cross. He believed that Jesus died. There was incontrovertible evidence that Jesus died on the cross.

Thomas believed that. But without trusting that the same Jesus who died is now risen, you are not a believer in Jesus Christ. Our whole faith, as Pastor Paul says to us in 1 Corinthians, our whole faith hinges on the fact of the resurrection.

Without the resurrection, we don't have a living faith. But we see here that the example of Thomas does prove worthwhile for us. I love how D.A.

Carson, who wrote a wonderful commentary about the Gospel of John, how he talks about Thomas as one who went from pessimistic unbelief to a transformed, joyful faith.

[15:52] That's the progression we saw even in this text. Pessimistic unbelief to transform joyful faith. That's the power of the resurrection in the heart of a believer. No matter the present circumstance that we may be in, in the church or in our own Christian lives, we are to be, as believers in Jesus, joy-filled people.

Because of the hope and promise of the resurrection that is ours. So, this is what the, you can see the procession of unbelief to faith in Thomas here.

The Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. It lives in us. The power of resurrection. And just as God raised Christ from the dead, we're told, He will give life to our mortal bodies by this same spirit, spirit living in you.

So, we're called as believers in Christ to believe in the fact of the resurrection. The question then for you today, this morning, is do you believe, as a follower of Jesus Christ, do you believe in the resurrection?

Because therein, how you answered that question, therein lies your irrepressible hope. If you believe in the nothing in this world, nothing, neither death or the most tragic occurrence can take away that assurance and that hope and that future that you have with Christ.

[17 : 33] If you believe in the resurrection, you have irrepressible hope. So, Jesus says to Thomas, and he says to us, stop being an obstinate unbeliever, but belief.

And this is Thomas' response. We see it here in verse 29. Thomas' confession. This confession makes him an example for us of biblical faith.

That's why I think we should call him believing Thomas rather than doubting Thomas. Here is a rational, and I want you to see here that Thomas' response was a rational and reasonable faith. based on examination, not a blind leap in the dark. Jesus says to him, examine the evidence, and Thomas, upon seeing, I don't think he actually touched the nail pierced ends or the spear pierced, because Jesus says, you've believed upon seeing.

So, upon seeing his Lord, and hearing his Lord speak, he came to faith, and he made this remarkable confession of faith, my Lord and my God.

[18 : 47] Notice here that Thomas' confession is a personal one, my Lord and my God, and it is a total surrendering to God, showing truly the true implication of faith in the fact of the resurrection.

The true implication, the true submission and surrender, leads to a right acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as the God man, who took on flesh and as the rightful lordship over our lives.

So, Thomas confesses this, and Jesus affirms, Jesus affirms Thomas' faith. You have believed, Jesus says, because you have seen me.

Now, this is the significance of this confession of Thomas. Again, Lord, our dear Thomas characterized Jesus' response. He said that Jesus' response is a beatitude.

Remember the beatitudes in Matthew? Blessed are. Here, Jesus offers another beatitude. Jesus says, blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.

[20 : 00] Thomas, you believe because you've seen me. Face to face. Blessed are those who have not seen and have God knows that many will come to faith.

And he says, look, the word blessed there characterizes those who will later believe, but it's a proclamation though. It's a proclamation and a statement.

Blessed, the word means happy. Blessedness, happy, that implies that these people who come to faith in Christ, blessed are they, are they, because they've been accepted by God.

Just like in the Beatitudes, the pronouncement of blessedness is the pronouncement of what characterizes those who are in the kingdom of God. The same way here, God is saying, blessed are you when you come to faith without seeing, because it's a promise of acceptance by your God. Accepted. Accepted are those who not seen and believed. Accepted by God. Beloved by God. And here's our Lord's word to us.

[21 : 42] So the question for us is, have you come to faith in him? Have you trusted your life to Jesus in total surrender as your Lord and your God? If so, happy are you, blessed are you, accepted are you by God.

The promise of forgiveness is yours. Peace with God is yours. The peace of the world cannot give or take away is yours. The promised Holy Spirit is yours.

Christ himself is yours for all eternity. Blessed beyond measure are you. This is the promise of our Lord for those who come to faith in him.

Now, John ends his gospel with this purpose statement. And I want to see how this purpose statement actually properly comes after this account of Thomas' story in verse 30 and 31.

Chapter 21 in John is kind of like an epilogue is before, right? Or epilogue is after. Yeah, prologue is before.

[22 : 53] Yes, right. I've confused myself there for a second. Epilogue, chapter 21 is an epilogue to the whole gospel. But here verse 30 and 31 is actually the conclusion of the story itself.

And John gives us the purpose statement for why he wrote this gospel. He says, Jesus did many other signs, and this John says and witnessed to as an eyewitness to the public ministry of Jesus from beginning to end.

And he says, Jesus did many other signs, but I have not included them in this writing. But these that are included in this gospel are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

That is the purpose why we gather. That is the purpose why we proclaim the gospel. It isn't just a reaction of history. It is a myth, like the Norse myth or the Greek myths for, you know, story time camping around the fire.

The purpose of the gospel message, the purpose of the whole of the Bible is so that we may come to faith in Jesus Christ, that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing we may have life in his name.

[24 : 20] You can find no clearer statement of intent than this that John has given us here. These things are written, and these things that are written are sufficient, John says, to lead you to faith in Jesus Christ.

The evidence is here. The evidence is here, and it's sufficient. And the story of believing Thomas is included to show us that faith in this God is an invitation to examine the evidence provided in God's word.

Examine the evidence. And if you're here this morning, may I say, if you're here this morning and have yet to come to faith, I hope that the knowledge that the Bible is full of former skeptics, that the Bible is chock full of people who were like you, former unbelievers, who examined the evidence and came to faith.

I hope that that realization will give you confidence to do the same. Because Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection that has been anticipated throughout the whole testament, that has been fulfilled in the new testament, and has been recorded by eyewitnesses who shed their blood.

These eyewitnesses shed their very blood because of this evidence. God is saying, these evidences, this account is sufficient for faith.

[25 : 55] So, examine the evidence. Jesus appeared, you know, not only to these eleven apostles, he also appeared before his ascension. He appeared before over five hundred people, including James, his brother, and lastly to Paul.

Now, those two people are probably two of the most devoted skeptics. There were, but they saw the evidence and came to faith. This is what Peter announced in Acts 2, after Pentecost, on preaching to the thousands and thousands that were assembled in Jerusalem.

He says to the crowd, this Jesus whom you crucified has been Lord and Christ. Peter's statement statements of the events that had just occurred weeks earlier are statements to which the crowd will have been well aware of.

Many of them will have been witness to the crucifixion of Jesus. So Peter said, this Jesus that you saw crucified, God raised up and he says of that, of that resurrection, we are all witnesses.

now the reality of Jesus' life and message is undeniable. The reality of his death on the cross is undeniable and the reality of his resurrection is undeniable.

[27 : 28] Maybe you're wondering how I can make such a claim. Well, I think it's because Peter makes that claim before thousands of people. Peter made that claim among enemies of Christ and no one refuted him.

How easy would it have been if indeed Jesus hadn't been risen from the dead when the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin heard it? Well, he's saying it in public.

All they had to do is just exhume the body and show them to be a liar. Think of a notable person in our world who died recently. I think of, for example, President Bush, the elder.

I think he died about a year and a half ago. Now, if someone were to claim that he's still alive, now, all you need to do is just go to YouTube and get a clip of his funeral that was televised.

And maybe even if you have permission, you can find his gravesite. Exhumed his body. He lies buried. Peter is making a claim that could be easily refuted by every witness that he was making it to.

[28 : 40] But no such person came to Peter and says, well, this is proof, evidence, that what you're saying is not true. Examine the evidence, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Examine the evidence, friends. Now, ultimately, the problem of unbelief is not really about the evidence at the end of the day, is it?

this is important for us to realize. The problem is not about the lack of evidence. The problem is whether we are prepared to follow where the evidence leads.

That is the true problem. Are you prepared? Are you ready to follow where the evidence leads about Jesus? Thomas was prepared. Thomas followed the evidence as they came to faith.

billions of souls have followed his example since and came to faith in Jesus Christ by following the evidence. So, making a rational and reasonable faith response upon hearing the gospel proclaimed and revealed in the pages of scripture is what we are called to do.

[29:57] You know, this St. Thomas, believing Thomas, I want to change that adjective, I hope it catches, believing Thomas, not doubting Thomas, this St.

Thomas staked his very life on this fact of the resurrection. Church tradition tells us that he was speared to death in India as a missionary of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

His death is not unique. All these eleven apostles died. Their fortunes and their lives staked on the very fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thomas is not the only one. There are new modern saints who have also done the same. I'm reminded of Jim Elliot and Nate Saint and their three other friends who in the 50s went to Ecuador to preach the gospel to people who have never heard it.

They staked their life on the evidence of the resurrection and they were speared to death. it's incontrovertible evidence.

[31:07] Are you willing to stake your life on it? Maybe you might not be called to murder them like these saints, but to make the confession that Thomas makes, to make that confession, brothers and sisters in Christ, if you've made that confession, confession, is to commit your life, your fortune, your whole being to this Lord.

This is the only proper response if you follow the evidence. My Lord and my God. May we have the boldness and the courage to join Thomas in making this personal confession and commitment to the Lord our God.

Because it is not any less than Jesus himself committed to us and committed his very life to us for our salvation. Let us pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.