

**“My Lord and my God” John 20:18-31**  
**Sunday, April 9, 2023**  
**Mark Archibald**

Anna has chosen a **surprise** for us for the Easter Sunday children’s moment. I wonder what it could be.

Oh! **It’s a baby chicken! It’s a chick!** We see lots of these around Easter. Why do you think we see baby chicks at Easter time?

Chicks are a symbol of new life.

What about today reminds us of new life?

Jesus rose from the dead! That is exceptional news. It’s exceptional for us – it means death has been defeated. The biggest, ugliest, scariest most final thing that people face is beaten! Christ has risen from the dead. He has trampled over death by his own death and resurrection. We too can experience new life now and eternal life forever with God. This chick reminds us that **Jesus gives us new life.**

This excitement we have was even more true for Jesus’ followers. Their friend and teacher and Lord had gone to a horrible and gruesome death. Everything he taught them seemed over. The purpose he gave them was over. And he was gone. He was dead. There was no doubt about this.

But three days later he rose from the dead. He was back! He could be with them again.

In the book of John, here’s the timeline of Jesus’ followers learning he was alive.

- Mary Magdalene goes to Jesus’ tomb that was sealed with a large stone. She saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.
- Mary Magdalene runs to Peter and John and tells them that people have taken Jesus out of the tomb. She doesn’t know where to find his body!
- Peter and John run to the tomb to see for themselves. They go inside and see that the graveclothes are there, but Jesus’ body isn’t there. Peter and John go back to their homes.
- Mary remains at the tomb, crying, assuming Jesus’ body has been taken away. Jesus speaks to her, reveals that it is him, alive from the dead, and joyfully she believes.
- Mary Magdalene goes and tells the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!”
- Later The disciples are together in a locked room. They are fearful of others because of their association with Jesus. Jesus came and stood among them saying “peace be with you.” He shows where the nails pierced his hands, and a sword pierced his side.

In all of these appearances, one disciple was missing. Which disciple was that?

Thomas. The one that doubted. The cynical one that was hard to convince. We could read through the passages where he’s mentioned and conclude he’s the obnoxious disciple. If the disciples were characters from the Simpsons, we might conclude that he’s Milhouse. If the disciples were characters from Saturday Night Live, we might conclude he was Debbie Downer. Let’s look at some instances to see what Thomas was like. And because Thomas seems to have such a bad and obnoxious reputation, every time you hear him speak you will hear the trombone say . . . **(Wah wah)**

When Jesus was growing in popularity, he was also growing in infamy. As he gained followers he gained enemies. Thomas knew an upcoming trip could be dangerous for Jesus, and therefore dangerous for him and the other disciples. Thomas is realistic, but also sarcastic. Before heading to Judea, a place where Jesus would encounter opposition, Thomas responded, **“Let us also go, that we may die with him.” (Wah wah)**

When Jesus is teaching the disciples, he tells them that he is going to be going away from them. When the disciples are discouraged by this, Jesus tells them,

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.*

Thomas is the one who responds, **“Lord we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” (Wah wah)** He doesn’t fully understand. He needs to know more.

Thomas is the disciple that’s realistic. The disciple that maybe asks to many questions, or the one that needs to know for sure before he agrees to something. Thomas is the disciple that is harder to convince. You know, the “fun one”.

So when the other disciples excitedly clamor around Thomas with the news of Jesus’ resurrection, declaring, “We have seen the Lord!” he’s reluctant. He doesn’t believe at all.

Thomas knew that Jesus died. People were witnesses to his death. Jesus was buried. People Thomas knew actually buried Jesus. Jesus’ tomb was guarded.

Thomas also knew the stone-cold fact that dead people don’t come back to life.

Yes, but all the disciples who witnessed seeing Jesus were the ones that were telling Thomas. Thomas also knew that just because a lot of people believe something doesn’t make it true.

We think less of Thomas because he doubted something impossible. We should praise Thomas for not being a sucker. For not joining in with others just because they are enthusiastic and convinced in their own belief. In this group of disciples, how often do you think Thomas felt like the only reasonable person in the room?

Thomas tells the disciples, **“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” (Wah wah)**

Throughout Christian history, Thomas has earned the nickname “Doubting Thomas”. All of the other disciples were all in, believing. Thomas would not believe an impossible thing until he had proof. He wasn’t just going to take their word for it.

So Jesus meets Thomas where he is.

<sup>26</sup>*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 you!”* <sup>27</sup>*Then he said to Thomas,*

***“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”***

Jesus asks Thomas to stop doubting. Jesus also met Thomas where he was in need. Jesus “showed” his disciples his hands and side in his first appearance among them. But Thomas specifically said, unless “I put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Jesus grants Thomas ALL of this, inviting, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Jesus meets Thomas at his place of doubt and invites him to believe.

And Thomas, in awe, responds, **“My Lord and my God.”**

I’m sure a few of us have found ourselves in this some place – Jesus inviting us to faith but also meeting us where we are.

In the book of John, Thomas is the last individual to fully receive the news of Jesus’ resurrection. His faith closes out all the stories of encountering the post-resurrection Jesus.

Mary Magdalene and Peter, throughout Jesus’ ministry, eagerly and swiftly trusted and followed Jesus. Their witness is important. But how convincing is it where the eager to believe people go all in on something? Are you convinced when the person that believes absolutely everything tells you impossible news?

Isn’t it great that John ends with the faith of the most skeptical believer? Thomas the doubter, the skeptic, the “fun one” – when he becomes Thomas the believer, that is significant. What a way to end these testimonies of Jesus’ resurrection.

To this day, the idea of a physical resurrection is a difficult thing to believe. Nothing that we know of is more final than death. But this resurrection of Jesus that Thomas was able to believe is just as vital for us today.

Rachel Held Evans in her book *Inspired* told this story about the importance of the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection he offers.

*I once attended a lecture given by a Christian theologian who rejected the notion of the physical resurrection of Jesus in favor of a spiritualized interpretation wherein Jesus simply rose from the dead “in his disciples’ hearts.” Just as Jesus lives on in our collective memory, he argued, so friends and family do not literally rise from the dead but rather gain “eternal life” whenever we honor their legacy.*

*After the lecture, I turned to the person next to me, a black pastor who had been fidgeting anxiously throughout the hour, and asked what he thought.*

***“If the resurrection is about getting raised in memories and hearts,” he said, “that’s not very good news for me or my people. What does spiritual resurrection mean for all the brothers who died on slave ships and all the women lying in unmarked plantation graves? Where’s their justice? Where’s their liberation?”***

***“If there’s one thing historic Christianity is clear on,” he said, “it’s that bodies matter to God. A revolution without bodies isn’t a revolution.”*** (Rachel Held Evans, *Inspired*, pages 178-9)

What good is a message of Jesus to the refugee, the addicted, the rejected, the downtrodden, if it doesn’t include resurrection? For people that have REALLY suffered, what kind of good news is, “this world is all there is”? Resurrection is where God makes all bad things right.

The story ends with an invitation. You haven’t physically seen Jesus like Thomas has. You haven’t felt the nail holes in his hand, or felt the scar of the spear in his side. But you are invited to believe.

***29 Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”***

***30 The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may continue to believe<sup>[d]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.***

In the end, Thomas was convinced by Jesus. Thomas was convinced by his resurrection.

Are you?

And if you are convinced by Jesus, what hope does that give you? If you are convinced of the resurrection of Jesus, how does that affect the way you live your life?