

“So That You May Believe” | Rev. Jordan Griesbeck | April 19, 2020

Acts 2:22ff

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. 25 For David says concerning him,... 27 ‘You will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’ 29 “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that... 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.”

1 Peter 1:3, 6-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

“Thomas Sunday,” the second Sunday of Easter reminds us of the disciple we do not want to be, “Doubting Thomas.” Jordan refers to two paintings as bookends to his message. In the first, by Carl Bloch, Jesus towers over Thomas with a critical, slightly sardonic expression while Thomas, humbled to his knees by the sight of the wounds of Jesus, looks at the ground in acute anguish. No one stands near him. Pastor Greg Thomas pointed out that Bloch got it wrong—Jesus does not criticize Thomas, he consoles him and invites him to believe.

How Jesus invites us to believe

a. Jesus hears Thomas’s cry.

First Jordan reminds us that none of the disciples expected a bodily resurrection. Jesus amazed them all, not just Thomas. Next, Thomas was a friend and follower of Jesus, truly close to him and devastated by his death. Third, Thomas asks to see the evidence, a good idea for anyone to be sure before believing that God brings joy after sadness and life after death. Thomas specifically asks for the evidence of hands, finger, side, and belief. Jesus hears Thomas’s appeal and answers in order.

b. Jesus pursues Thomas through locked doors

In both of the two appearances in John 20, Jesus walks through locked doors to find his disciples and bring peace.

c. Jesus shows Thomas the scars

This intimate, vulnerable action shows to Thomas his commitment to them, that he gave his life for them. The God of the universe said to Thomas, “Touch me” so that Thomas can see that Jesus has carried his pain and tears. Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, pointed out that when we believe, we are not just giving intellectual assent, but we are actually asking if we can trust Jesus, a trust that believes that God is on our side and cares about a relationship with us personally. Jordan points out that almost everyone has doubts—and those who have had horrible, unspeakable things happen think, “How could a good God allow it? Could a truly powerful God have stopped it?” Others have intellectual questions about how it could all be possible—Noah and the ark, miracles, virgin birth, resurrection. Like Thomas Didymus (the Twin), we are all twins within, one half doubting and one half believing. Jesus knows all our doubts and questions and can break through locked doors to bring belief. And when we have loved ones who don’t believe and it gnaws at us, the removal of doubt is not up to us. It’s God’s task, and He can get through to them.

What Jesus asks us to believe

a. Thomas’s response, “My Lord and My God!”

John 1:1 says that in the beginning Jesus is the Word. The whole point of John’s gospel is that we believe that Jesus is God. We want to be like Thomas because he demands the real Jesus and comes to him only after he sees that this body is the real man, not a fake or poseur or substitute. Adults in America offer fake Jesuses to kids all the time: the Therapist Jesus who lives to make us happy, the best version of our Enneagram test:

John 20:19-31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." 24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands 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." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these 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.

the Nice guy Jesus who teaches us to love each other and be good people—inspiration influencer, but not "My God!"

b. Thomas demands the real Jesus

He wants a solid, physical body, someone he can touch and understand. Jesus's physical body shows us he is committed to all parts of us—our physical lives as well as our spiritual lives, and he cares about poverty, illness, and suffering. He says, "I am making all things new." He will make us new physically as well as spiritually. Jesus's new body is a blueprint for hope that one day after death our bodies will be like his and we will be together physically. Jesus's body also matters because there are some wounds that can only be healed by touch. It took a physical death to pay for sin.

c. Thomas also demands a personal Jesus, "My Lord and My God!" Rowan Williams pointed out that Jesus is not like a UFO or the Loch Ness Monster, interesting but having no immediate effect on our lives. Jesus is not just a good friend, but an integral part of the entirety of our lives. He is Lord.

Where Jesus invites Thomas to believe

a. Where do we find Jesus?

Jesus starts to turn from Thomas to us, to "those who have not seen, yet believe." The disciples meet at first on Easter Sunday, the first day of the week. Then when Thomas is among them, it is eight days later (in Jewish reckoning, one week later) on the next Sunday, both events the first Sunday gatherings of the church to worship. Look for Jesus in the assembly of believers, and you will find all the parts of the church at work there: people gathered together, worship, the gospel preached, the eucharist celebrated, confession and forgiveness of sins, affirmations of faith, and people sent out to be the body of Christ to their neighbors and in the world. Go to the meeting of believers and see if Jesus meets you there. Just show up.

b. In the beginning was the Word

John 20:31 "And these 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." There is a book so that we may find Jesus there, too. Take your doubts to church and to the Scriptures, and see if Jesus meets you there.

Conclusion

In *Star Wars*, episode 7, *The Force Awakens*, Rae and Fin ask Han Solo, "Was it all true?" Han says, "It was all true, all of it." Jesus meets Thomas and us and says, "It's all true."

Caravaggio painted Jesus meeting Thomas in a different manner than Bloch. Jesus is on a level with Thomas and takes Thomas's arm to guide his finger into the wound in Jesus's side. Jesus's face is comforting and kind. Thomas is child-like, wondering, amazed and the other disciples are leaning in, engaged and accepting of Thomas's doubts as real and natural. Eugene Peterson's son said at his father's funeral that his dad had only one sermon, one message. Each night after lights out, he would lean over his son and whisper in his ear, "God loves you. He is on your side. He is coming after you, and He is relentless."

Discussion

1. List as many doubts as you can think of that have kept you or a loved one from believing in the resurrection of Jesus. Discuss them and pray for each doubt, committing it to Jesus to handle.
2. Consider the implications of Jesus's body being raised. What difference does this make for you personally and for the church at large? What does this mean for the ministries of the church in the world?
3. How has this message shaped your idea of Thomas?

By Claudia Springer

