

**The Third Day, Living the Resurrection – 3. Thomas**  
**John 20:24-31**  
**March 3, 2024**  
**Pastor Bethany Nelson**

On New Years Eve in 2008, my Grandpa died. For the hours before his death, I sat with my Grandma, Mom, aunts and cousins around his bedside. We told stories, we sang some of his favorite songs, we laughed a bit, and cried a lot. And when he took his final breath, we hugged one another again.

After a time, we gathered our things and began to get ready to leave. *What now?* Even our small town was a buzz with New Years festivities. The streets had a glow and murmur to them, filled with people celebrating. In contrast, our hearts were heavy.

It would have made sense for us to go home alone - each to our own quiet cocoons to grieve and to cry. But something within us, invited us another way. Maybe it was the spirit of Grandpa, but it certainly was the voice of Jesus — inviting us to stay in community.

And so instead of going home, we went to the NYE gathering of our church. Let me tell you, it was the right choice. We were greeted with warm hugs, with soft tears, and hours of companionship as our people shared their own stories and offered us hope.

And it didn't end there — just days later, they filled the pews of the church for Grandpa's funeral. And when our voices faltered during songs, they sang even louder. When our words were broken and cracked as we said our prayers and creeds, theirs were strong and sure. They held us, giving us strength.

Now, I know for some - the idea of being around others in times of profound grief sounds unbearable. But for centuries, people have centered both their lives and deaths in the community of others. This was certainly true for Jesus and his disciples. It was custom then, when a person died, to wash the body and wrap them in cloth and bring them to the family tomb.

Then, in Jewish tradition, for seven days the family stays together in their home. For this practice of *shiva*, they take rest from "regular" life, leaving only to visit the tomb. Only on the eighth day, do they begin their return to some daily activities. Although the time of grief is certainly not finished, they begin to be *among the living* once again.

In the death of Jesus, we see some of these practices at work. A disciple named Joseph of Arimathea, cared for the body of Jesus. John's Gospel tells us he was joined by Nicodemus. You'll recognize him as a Jewish leader who once met Jesus in the darkness of night, with questions and doubts, and was welcomed by Jesus with these words of promise: "*God so loved the world that God gave their only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish, but have eternal life.*"

This encounter with Jesus so changed Nicodemus, that he now joined Joseph in wrapping and anointing Christ's body as they prepared for burial. Holy and tender work, as they cared for the only Son of God.

Laid in the tomb, Jesus was visited by his family, as was custom. And we hear how the disciples stayed together in the upper room, keeping space for their own grief — and doing so in community, just as they had been taught.

It's here, that Jesus first meets the disciples. John's gospel tells us,

"It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid... Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy." - John 20:19-20

But Thomas, wasn't with the disciples when Jesus first arrived. We don't know why, all we're told is this: Thomas missed the big event. The last time he had seen his friends, they were united in their grief. Now? The disciples were leaping and jumping with joy.

"*We have seen the Lord!*" They tell him, and I always imagine a bright and enthusiastic space, with laughter and smiles, dancing and unrestrained joy. For any of us who have buried someone we love, I bet you can still feel in your heart that hope and longing to see them again. You can feel how you'd simply burst with joy to see them again.

Thomas tells the disciples, "*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by nails, I won't believe it*" (John 20:25). This is the precise verse that gives Thomas the moniker, "doubting Thomas." Although I think it is a little unfair, as it is the same response the other disciples had when Mary told them what she had seen. Like any of us who have been hurt, who are in deep grief, Thomas and the disciples exercised a fair amount of caution to protect themselves from further pain.

I appreciate the honesty of Thomas, as it is so... relatable. All of us have experienced grief in our lives. All of us have known doubt. All of us have longed for Jesus to meet us in both of these places.

This morning, I'm not going to spend much time focusing on the doubt of Thomas, instead - I'll invite you to go back and watch our most recent message series on Doubt, which we just concluded a couple weeks ago. *You can even watch them on Messiah's app.*

Instead, today I want us to look at the importance of community in the midst of hard seasons in our lives. Because Thomas is not only experiencing doubt, but also grief and a total reorientation of his life and future. The entire trajectory of his life has shifted because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Alright, so right now: Thomas and the disciples are gathered in the upper room. Though the mood of the other disciples has shifted, Thomas remains in a significant period of mourning.

Yet, even though the other disciples had witnessed Jesus, they didn't push Thomas out. They didn't mock him for not believing, or leave him to struggle on his own. Instead, they stayed with him. Watching and waiting.

In his book, *The Third Day*, on which this message series is based, Bishop Tom Berlin tells a story. In it, a group of students asked a pastor if the church had ever provided care to him in the middle of a hard season. The Pastor said, "Yes, there was a time when I could not care for the church and where the church, in love, cared for me. In fact, due to circumstances I endured, I felt I lost my faith in that time. I felt despair.

That is a very hard as a pastor. It is hard to encourage others in faith when you feel like you have lost a sense of hope.”

[When he told the church leaders] they suggested that their Pastor stay in community and let them believe for him. Believe for him. What does that mean? The pastor said, “I’m not really sure. I only know that I stayed, and the church, in grace, stayed with me. They prayed for me and showed me kindness and love, and after a time, my faith was renewed. I realized I was not alone.”<sup>1</sup>

And this, I think, is what Thomas and the other disciples did. Thomas stayed in community and allowed them to believe for him. To carry his worries, his fears, his doubts and hold him in love. This is one of the greatest gifts of community.

To his great credit, Thomas did not allow the certainty of others, nor his own feelings, tear apart the community they had built. He didn’t go away and hide by himself, but allowed himself to stay in the care of others.

Actually, he was incredibly honest, “*unless I see this for myself, I cannot believe.*” Speaking this honestly, and staying in community takes courage from Thomas. But it also tells us that this group had built a space where each belonged and could be their full selves. We don’t see hesitation from Thomas nor the other disciples, in staying together — instead they practice companionship, empathy, and love.

When I read the story of Thomas, I see a community of people willing to believe for him, to hold him safely, and create space for him to belong without judgement.

Until, eventually, Thomas found his way to a renewed faith.  
This is the power of community.

To help hold space for us, to help guide us toward healing and renewed faith.

I wonder what communities have held space for you: are there spaces where you feel entirely welcomed to be yourself? And when have you held that space for others? How might the story of Thomas invite you to deepen your sense of community, so that others can belong and believe?

Alright, so Thomas was held by the disciples in his grief and disbelieving. But then, on the eighth day, something happened. First, remember that the eighth day is also the day when *shiva*, that first phase of Jewish mourning, ends and people would begin their ascent back into daily life. This day does not mark the end of their grieving, but does begin a new phase: where you discover what it means to live *with* your grief, how to carry on with your life is this new season.

And so, on this day: the first day of this new phase, the first day of a new week, and the first day of a wholly new life: Thomas meets Jesus. In this space between, the disciples *believed for him*, and now: Thomas sees Jesus with fresh eyes.

Now, if the community had not held Thomas throughout this week...

If they had judged him for his disbelieving, or pushed him aside for his grief...

If Thomas could not trust his community to care for him, and he had walked away...

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<sup>1</sup> Berlin, Tom. 2023. *The Third Day: Living the Resurrection*, page 47.

If this *entire* group had not been intentionally creating and building community,  
but instead kept as strictly colleagues and travel companions...

If *any* of these things had happened in another way,  
Thomas would not have experienced this next thing.  
It was *because* of his courage to trust others,  
because of the beloved community they had built,  
because they all dared to do life together,  
that Thomas was able to experiencing renewed faith  
and see the Risen Christ in this precise way:

John's Gospel tells it like this:

After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!" — John 20:26-27

This is an important lesson for us, as the church. Thomas' faith community did not cast him out for experiencing grief or a crisis of faith. Instead, they held, comforted, and heard him. AND then: Jesus met Thomas where he was. He met Thomas in this space of fear and disbelief. There was no shame, no mocking, no anger. Instead, what was the first word Jesus spoke? Peace.

Peace be with you.

Peace consume your grief, your fear, your guilt, your disbelief.

Peace overwhelm your senses, override the voices in your head, and the pounding of your heart.

Peace.

Not only did Jesus speak peace — but then he *acted* in this same way.

He knew precisely how to comfort Thomas and to give him a reassured faith.

Jesus reached out with comfort and empathy, I imagine a tenderness in his eyes and his voice as he spoke:

*See Thomas, it is me. Take a look here, at my hands and at my side.  
Do not worry anymore, I am with you.*

And I think this is precisely how Jesus comes to each of us.

Jesus disrupts the cycles of grief, doubt, or fear in our lives.

And instead of bringing judgement, Jesus brings empathy, understanding, and peace.

Thomas offers us a story of faith that mirrors our own. Just as Thomas lived in the "in between" time between hearing news of Jesus resurrection, and seeing it tangibly for himself — so too, do we live in the middle.

We live, and make our faith, based on the testimony and witness of others. It is because of Thomas, Simon Peter, Mary Magdalene, and others that we can say: Christ is Risen! But it is because of someone in your life: a parent, a neighbor, a Sunday School teacher or friend, that you know what that *means*. It is because of their witness and love that you can name the Risen Christ at work in your life. *And there might very well be someone here, who is thinking that YOU are the reason they know what the love of God looks like.*

And we, like Thomas, find strength and comfort when held in community.  
God did not create us in isolation, nor did Jesus practice his ministry in isolation.

Rather, we experience most fully the creative, redemptive, power of God's love and grace most fully when we are in community. It is through our relationships with others that we find greater joy in our best days, and companionship on our worst. Though there is not one way of defining who, or what, makes up our community.  
And we might be part of a great number of them - what a privilege and gift that is, to have so many people surrounding you.

For some of us, our community is found in life long friends who have *seen it all*.  
For others - it is a chosen family who sees & accepts us fully, even when others do not.  
And for others, like yourselves, you find it right here: among a community of believers who are also doing their best to grow in love of God or others.

Community is both an invitation and gift from God that helps us grow in faith, and more clearly understand God's vision for our world. These are also the people and places that will hold you, when like Thomas, you experience a crisis of faith, are drowning in grief, or disoriented by life. In these places, they hold that "in between time", believing for you, until you reach the eighth day, and meet Jesus again with renewed faith.

Right now today, there are some among us who feel at the very beginning of those eight days. You might feel immense grief or confusion, perhaps you feel alone. You might even feel, like Thomas, a sense of *unbelieving* that anything might change.  
If this is you: I want to thank you for showing up today. I want to encourage and invite you to *keep* showing up. Even if you aren't sure what or how to believe, let us care and hold you in this space. You're not alone.

And some of us might find ourselves with the rest of the disciples: the ones creating and holding space. The ones who hold Thomas and stay with him, faithfully, believing for him until he is ready and whole.  
If this is you: I want to thank you for showing up today, too. Community doesn't happen by accident. It takes great intention and care to create and sustain them. And so, I thank you for modeling the love of Jesus by creating space without judgement and making space for others be fully present. I encourage and invite you to lean in to this piece of community, by welcoming one another, praying for one another, and actively choosing to do your part to build community.

Now, some of us are part of a third group... some of us have found our eight day. Where we, like Thomas, have met Jesus and experienced the true and lasting gift of the resurrection. Some of us have found a new life, a resistant joy, a profound understanding of how great God's love for you, through Christ, is.  
And I thank you for being here today, too. You keep the life and good news of Jesus alive. Because it is by your invitation, your welcome, your witness that others are invited to meet the Risen Christ, too.

The Gospel of John closes this story in this way:

Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples 'presence, signs that aren't recorded in this scroll. But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name. — John 20:30-31

Did you catch this? This entire story:

The story of Jesus: his birth, every teaching, his death and resurrection...

The story of Mary, the disciples, and Jesus *meeting* the resurrected Jesus...

The story of Thomas being held *by* community...

All of this, has been told for *you*.

It is a gift, for *you*.

So that you can know that the great love of Jesus is yours.

This is your invitation to be part of the story.

Now, we don't know much about the life of Thomas after this account, but tradition tells us Thomas travelled as a missionary to India around the year 57. He preached and taught, planted churches, and became one of the most significant evangelists of the first century. Some "St Thomas Christian's today still trace their roots back to his work in India in the first century.

Many of us have only thought of Thomas as "doubting Thomas" — but did you know, scripture *actually* refers to him as Thomas Didymos. Thomas the twin. The moniker we know so well does not appear. He is simply: Thomas Didymos.

Professor Elaine Pagels teaches that this name, *Didymos*, was given to Thomas not because he *actually* was a twin. But because he was a twin, in character, to Jesus... that his life so mirrored that of the Risen Christ, that people looked to Thomas and saw one who embodied the love of Jesus so fully he could be his twin.

Isn't that incredible? Thomas, who famously doubted the resurrection, went on to plant new churches, build a community with millions of followers across the world, and became so known by his words and actions, that they called him the *twin* of Christ.

And it all began in community. One that was created and blessed by Christ, but sustained through the faithful love of ordinary followers of Jesus. And through this community, Thomas found a renewed faith, that changed the course of his life.

Friends, may you be as Thomas: may you know community, may you know Christ, and may you mirror his great love all the days of your life.

Let us pray:

Risen Christ, as you met Thomas offering assurance and comfort, forever changing his life — may we experience transformation, too. Give us comfort, give us courage, give us renewed faith. Bless our communities that we mirror your image as we care for one another, wrapping them in your love. In your name we pray: Amen.

**Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of March 3, 2024**

### **Weekly Prayer**

O Lord God, who hast called thy servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown: Give us faith to go out with a good courage, not knowing whither we go, but only that thy hand is leading us, and thy love supporting us; to the glory of thy Name. -- Prayer of Good Courage

## **Monday, March 4**

### **Scripture: John 20:24-29**

Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn't with the disciples when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord!" But he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won't believe." After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!" Thomas responded to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus replied, "Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don't see and yet believe."

### **Observation**

In the verses prior, Jesus has resurrected and appeared to Mary and the disciples, but Thomas was not there. When he has heard the news, he responds with hesitation and fear. This has given him the moniker, "doubting Thomas," although I suspect we might as easily sub in our own names. Don't we all desire, as Thomas, to meet Jesus and have our fears and worries subside? In time, Jesus does appear to Thomas, and what do you notice? Jesus did not minimize Thomas or his feelings but gave to him what was needed: peace.

### **Application**

"Peace be with you," Jesus said clearly to Thomas. Then he addressed his worries and fear by being fully present to him. How have you experienced Jesus as fully present to your own fears or worries? How does Jesus offer you peace today?

### **Prayer**

God of peace, thank you for being with me today. Give me courage to name my questions as fears, as Thomas did. Help me to trust that you will show me the way and bring comfort to my heart. Amen.

## **Tuesday, March 5**

### **Scripture: John 1:1, 20:26-28**

In the beginning was the Word  
and the Word was with God  
and the Word was God.

After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!" Thomas responded to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

### **Observation**

John's Gospel begins with the words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). At the end, Thomas became the first person in the entire gospel to fully get that, to look at Jesus and address him directly as "God."

### **Application**

The unspoken invitation here is: will you join Thomas in bowing before Jesus and saying "My Lord and my God"? Though you've likely not seen Jesus as Thomas did, we are invited into the

same faith, declaring with our words and actions that Jesus is God. How have you experienced the life-changing love of Jesus?

### **Prayer**

My Lord and my God, be with me today. Channel my questions and transform them into a belief that is steady. Open my heart to experience your presence and love, today and always. Amen.

### **Wednesday, March 6**

#### **Scripture: John 20:30-31**

Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples' presence, signs that aren't recorded in this scroll. But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.

#### **Observation**

Throughout this chapter, Jesus has met Mary and the disciples, offering them signs of his redeeming love and presence. But I've always loved these two short verses at the end of the chapter, because they reveal to us *why* the Gospel of John was written. Dear ones, these words are written for you. You are not an accidental reader of the Good News of Jesus; *you* are the intentional recipient of this good news. All that has been written down about Jesus' life and resurrection is so that *you* can believe and know Christ, too.

#### **Application**

All that Jesus said to those first disciples, Jesus carries to you: peace, promise, and hope. And though sometimes we might wish that Jesus would appear to us, as he did to Thomas, these words are a gift to you: that you are not alone in your worries or wonderings, and that Jesus, the Risen Son of God, brings you peace.

### **Prayer**

Good and loving Christ, thank you for inspiring your followers to tell your story. Help me to see you in my own life and continue to share your words of hope and promise, that others might find life and peace in you. Amen.

### **Thursday, March 7**

#### **Scripture: John 14:1-7**

"Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. You know the way to the place I'm going." Thomas asked, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him."

#### **Observation**

Thomas is one of our quieter disciples, with fewer interactions recorded in scripture than others. But, like many quiet disciples, when he speaks he leaves a significant mark. In this passage, Jesus is inviting the disciples to place their trust in Christ -- to let go of their worries, and have faith that God will care for them now, just as God has long tended to God's people. Thomas, seeking clarity, asks with bravery: "Lord, we don't know where you are going, how can we know the way?"



### **Application**

What questions arise for you as you read the stories and words of Jesus? Do you, as Thomas, wish for clarity? I'm sure we all do! Perhaps Jesus words to Thomas can be a word of comfort for us all: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." We know God's character, God's desires, God's goodness *through* the life and resurrection of Jesus. Sometimes called the Good Shepherd, Christ will guide us toward truth, love, and life. When things feel uncertain or unclear, let this be our prayer: "Lord, show me the way to you."

### **Prayer**

Lord, show me the way to you. Help me to follow and trust you, even if I cannot see the way to go. Wrap me in your care, as I seek to follow you all the days of my life. Amen.

### **Friday, March 8**

#### **Scripture: John 17:9-18**

"I'm praying for them. I'm not praying for the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours. Everything that is mine is yours and everything that is yours is mine; I have been glorified in them. I'm no longer in the world, but they are in the world, even as I'm coming to you. Holy Father, watch over them in your name, the name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are one. When I was with them, I watched over them in your name, the name you gave to me, and I kept them safe. None of them were lost, except the one who was destined for destruction, so that scripture would be fulfilled. Now I'm coming to you and I say these things while I'm in the world so that they can share completely in my joy. I gave your word to them and the world hated them, because they don't belong to this world, just as I don't belong to this world. I'm not asking that you take them out of this world but that you keep them safe from the evil one. They don't belong to this world, just as I don't belong to this world. Make them holy in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

### **Observation**

Today, we read a prayer – a conversation – Jesus has with God. These words reveal to us what was on Christ's heart, that is that we might know fully God's creating and redeeming power in our lives, and be transformed. In verse 18, Jesus says, "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them." These words are not only for the first disciples, but for you! Jesus is sending you into the world to share the life-changing love of God with others.

### **Application**

It is not always an easy call, then or now. When has following God's call on your life challenged you? How has Jesus' hope and peace helped you through the ups and downs on your journey of knowing, loving and serving God?

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank you for calling me to follow you. Help me to trust you at every stage of my journey, without trying to compare my path with anyone else's. Amen.

### **Saturday, March 9**

#### **Scripture: John 17:20-26**

"I'm not praying only for them but also for those who believe in me because of their word. I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me. I've given them the glory that you gave me so

that they can be one just as we are one. I'm in them and you are in me so that they will be made perfectly one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you have loved them just as you loved me. "Father, I want those you gave me to be with me where I am. Then they can see my glory, which you gave me because you loved me before the creation of the world. "Righteous Father, even the world didn't know you, but I've known you, and these believers know that you sent me. I've made your name known to them and will continue to make it known so that your love for me will be in them, and I myself will be in them."

### **Observation**

Jesus continues his prayer in these verses today, further inviting and encouraging us to follow Jesus and share his story with the world. Christ desires that all people know God's love, healing, and peace. How is Jesus inviting you to grow in love of God, and share that with others?

### **Application**

It can be tempting to compare your journey with other people's, to wish your journey were more like someone else's. Jesus doesn't call all of his followers down the same path. We each have a unique set of life experiences, gifts, and a personal relationship with Jesus. What aspects of your journey are easiest for you to thank God for? Which parts do you wish God would change, or free you from? In what ways can you see that you've grown through tough things you've faced with God in the past?

### **Prayer**

Good and loving God, thank you for the witness of the first disciples. Help me to follow you fully, as they did. Strengthen your people and your church, so that our words and actions invite others to know and experience your goodness. Amen.