

**Sermon preached at St. John's Episcopal Church, West Hartford, CT**  
**The Reverend Margie Baker**  
**Easter 2, Year A**  
**April 19, 2020**

I love the rhythm of the church year. We begin in Advent, in waiting. At Christmas we celebrate the Incarnation, the coming of God among us. We tell the stories of our faith. We move into Lent, that solemn preparation for the Mystery of Easter. We weep at the foot of the cross on Good Friday and participate in the joyful celebration of the empty tomb on Easter morning. Alleluia, the Lord is risen!

And then, like clockwork, *every year*, we tell the story of Thomas. Poor Thomas. Poor Doubting Thomas. We hear this gospel *every year* on the Sunday after Easter. Every year, we hear how Thomas doubted. And every year I think to myself, it seems like Thomas got a raw deal. The way this story is usually told feels unfair. It reduces Thomas to *only* a doubter, and it separates him from the other disciples, who therefore must *not* doubt.

It is true: Thomas doubts that Jesus has appeared to his friends. But that's not all he does, and his doubt is not all that different from the doubt and disbelief we see elsewhere in the gospels. If we take the story of Thomas to be a *yay for us! We have more faith than Thomas!* type of story, I think we're missing the boat. Thomas's doubt matters not because he is somehow less worthy or unbelieving, but because it lets each and every one of us know that Jesus meets us just as we are, and that God doesn't abandon us for not being sure.

We may assume that Thomas's words mark him as more skeptical, more doubtful than his peers. But is this fair? The others have seen the risen Jesus. Doubt isn't an option for them any more. They *know*. They have seen. They have been in the same room with Jesus, their rabbi, the one who died. *Thomas wasn't there*. Is it fair to put so much weight on this one moment of skepticism, after a long run of following Jesus? Thomas hears the news, but it doesn't stick. Is it because he is skeptical? Perhaps. His doubt could come from skepticism. It could also come from deep grief, from a wariness

of letting hope bubble up only to be painfully broken again. The disciples had been so hopeful when they heard the crowds on Palm Sunday. What triumph! What a welcome! And then came the arrest, and everything that followed. Is it any wonder that Thomas is wary? His friends have seen Jesus, or so they say. Doesn't he deserve the same? How can he believe what he hasn't seen?

Another assumption, and an important one to tackle head-on, is that Thomas's doubt is unique. Thomas's doubt is dramatically worded, but we hear plenty of doubt in nearly all of the resurrection appearances across the four gospels. In Mark, the earliest of the gospels, a young man in white appears to the women at the empty tomb, and he tells them that Jesus has been raised, and to go to Galilee. It ends thus: "So the women went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."<sup>1</sup> The end. In Matthew, the risen Christ appears to the disciples on a mountain. The evangelist describes their reaction: "When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted."<sup>2</sup> In Luke, none of the disciples believe the women's report, none except Peter. "Returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."<sup>3</sup> Then on the road to Emmaus, Jesus appears to two disciples who do not recognize him until he takes, blesses, and breaks the bread, at which point he disappears and they get it. Later that same day, Jesus appears to the eleven in a closed room, and they are terrified and think he's a ghost. Even after showing his scars, we hear: "in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering."<sup>4</sup> And let us not forget the story we heard last week, from the gospel of John. Mary Magdalene thought Jesus was the gardener until he called her by name!<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 16:8

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:17

<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:9-11

<sup>4</sup> Luke 24:41a

<sup>5</sup> John 20:16

Doubt and disbelief are part of *every* resurrection appearance, with some of the doubt and disbelief feeling much more egregious than Thomas's. I think that highlighting Thomas's doubt has little if anything to do with calling him out and everything to do with showing how Jesus reveals himself to those who love him, who follow him, who yearn for him. In none of the stories does Jesus judge those who cannot see him clearly. In all of the resurrection appearances, Jesus responds to doubt, disbelief, and fear with his presence, his peace, his love.

Jesus makes himself known to those who have followed him. In revealing himself, he reveals the power of God, God who made the heavens and the earth, who has power even over death itself. In the first chapter of John the evangelist declares, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."<sup>6</sup> The Son makes the Father known. John calls this revealing aspect *the Word*. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word *is* the revealing aspect of God, and the Word becomes incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus reveals who God is. The Risen Christ continues and develops that revelation. In the Risen Christ the disciples, and then the Church, learn that God is stronger even than death, and that by abiding in, believing in, Jesus we have life in abundance, even when we die. Christ makes known things we couldn't learn on our own. Christ is the revealing light of God, the whisper of God.

The disciples tried to share the Good News of Easter with Thomas, but Thomas needed Christ's own revelation to help him to belief. And that's okay. It's more than okay- what a gift to us to see Jesus appear to Thomas in his doubt, love Thomas in his doubt, *tend* to him in his doubt. What I love so much about this story is that Jesus doesn't abandon Thomas for his doubt. Jesus doesn't tell him to get out. His friends clearly don't say that either, because there he is with them the next week. Instead his friends keep him around even with his skepticism, and when Jesus shows up, he goes straight to Thomas and offers him what he needs. More than he needs, in fact; Jesus says *here, touch me*, and the mere offer is enough to make Thomas proclaim *my Lord*

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<sup>6</sup> John 1:18

*and my God.* He comes to believe in the Son of God, in Christ who is risen from the dead and who offers life, and life in abundance.

Jesus comes among the disciples locked in their upper room, and his presence brings Peace. Jesus, the revelation of God, the Word, the light shining in the darkness- Jesus can still meet us in our locked rooms, and Jesus still offers us his Peace. Perhaps Jesus meets us in a card or a phone call from a friend, in prayer, in worshipping together even though we aren't in the same place. Perhaps we find that Peace that passes all understanding in a moment of unexpected joy, in the sight of a goldfinch outside the window or a message of love in sidewalk chalk. Or maybe Jesus meets us in our sorrow or anxiety, and whispers a word of love and hope that is small but durable, a light that shines in the darkness which the darkness *cannot* overcome. Whatever your locked room looks like, know that the risen Lord meets you there. AMEN.