

The Disciple from Missouri
John 20.19-31

Introduction:

A Sunday school teacher gathered her class together and said, "Today we are going to review what we have learned this year."

"Where was Jesus born?" Tommy
"Pittsburgh" "Nooo," She said.
Then it was Philadelphia."

No. (A bit exasperated) Someone ... Mary.
"He was born in Bethlehem." She said.

"That's right."

Tommy turned to his friend and muttered, "I knew it was somewhere in Pennsylvania."

Now what does this have to do with us ... and the story of Doubting Thomas?

Very simply. Very few people realize that Thomas was from Missouri. Now, if you remember Missouri is known as the "Show Me" State – and Thomas showed those characteristics to a fault.

Thomas is my favorite apostle. From my perspective, Thomas has always gotten a bad rap And it is all because of one line in this gospel of John.

What makes it worse, in my mind, is that the word "doubt" does not appear in the passage. The word that has been translated as "doubt" actually means "to be without belief."

The opposite of doubt – is certainty
The opposite of dis-belief – is belief
The opposite of faithless – is faith

So, when Jesus speaks to Thomas, he does not say, "stop doubting and believe."

He says, "stop ***dis-believing*** and believe."

Text:

On Easter day ... Jesus appears to the disciples
calms them
blesses them
empowers them
commissions them

Thomas was not with them

When he comes back, he tells them, "I won't believe it until I see him, put my fingers in the nail holes and in his side."

Commentary:

In essence he is not any different from the disciples
when the women told them tomb was empty
when they women told them he was risen!!

when Jesus first appeared to them

Thomas was off by himself

Thomas was off trying to deal with his
disappointment

in himself

in his friends

in his master ... gospel ... ministry

frustration

He was not indulging in

mental gymnastics

an effort to dodge the truth

an effort to justify himself
they were sincere
brutally honest

What should he do now that his world was turn up-side
down?

he did not want to profess what he didn't believe
he would not bow to peer pressure
he would not be satisfied with incomplete answers -
at least not at this stage in his life.

But ... He wrestled in solitude - and as a result he missed a
lot
support of his friends
their shared memories ... and insights

Mostly - he missed Jesus' appearance and the wonder and
joy that it brought - and the reassurance
It took him a whole week of wandering around inside of his
own head before he finally got enough sense to go back to
the group.

It was then that Jesus re-appears to them
blessed them
went directly to Thomas

Thomas - look here - touch there
stop this dis-belief
I have work for you to do

True to Thomas's character
he believes
he unreservedly commits himself to Jesus

Present Context:

Easter is over for another year - or so we think.
Put enthusiasm away
haul out our old skepticism
put our questions back in place
Unaddressed
Unanswered

Does Easter really make any difference?
How is the world different - now from then?
Where is the power that is supposed to be ours as a
result of Easter resurrection?

Why does the life of the church continues mostly
unchanged?

What are we supposed to
go next? do next?

Uncertainty is a very pernicious problem
questions can surface ... and demand answers
is the gospel true
is it intellectually defensible?
Is it realistic
Is it relevant?
Is it "manly" - especially a problem for men

Uncertainty can take many forms
about our role
whether our role is worth anything
whether we will be missed if we disappear

Uncertainty can attack us at our most noble points
we want to help others
they need more than we have to give
we need to take care of ourselves first

Uncertainty can cause us to ask the wrong questions - and
find the wrong answers

Theologizing in Context:

Remember, because Thomas was off on his own
sulking - brooding
his missed a lot
he got in the way of his healing

It was only when he returned to the fellowship and opened
himself up to them that he experienced the power of the
risen Christ.

When things go badly in our own lives
we have the same tendency
to pull back
to sulk
to think we are the only ones who have ever
gone through this problem
Felt this way

we think we are the only ones who have ever
been really hurt
been really betrayed
been really treated unfairly

Then, when we start to think things over in our minds - the
conversations that we hold there do not look anything like
what has really happened
what the other person is really thinking/feeling

Before long, we have built up an incredible problem - that we
know has no solution
know, no one wants to deal with
know no one has any idea what it is like
Then we begin to place on those who are part of the problem
all sorts of evil intents

all sorts of thoughts they never had
all sorts of things said that they never said

And so, instead of
seeking out the fellowship
attempting to deal with the problem openly
sharing our hurts and disappointments
expressing our resentments

We simply withdraw

Profound mistake ... the community has
insights and perspectives that no one person alone
can have
the ability to be at different places at the same time so
that when

One is down ... Another can be up
when one is hurting ... another can comfort
when one has questions ... another has insights

Thomas found his answers
not in his own head
not in his own space
but in the presence of his brothers and sisters - who
had experienced the risen Christ

That is the way it is for us too
it is ONLY in the fellowship of the community that we
have any hope of
meeting the risen Christ
experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit
resolving the uncertainties that confront us.

There is a story of a man who had been faithful to the life
and work of the church for many years –
he fell on hard times – lost his job
his wife died

He became very bitter because it seemed that God had abandoned him.

He announced, to no one in particular, that he was NEVER coming back to church for as long as he lived and there was nothing that anyone could say to change his mind.

Shortly thereafter the pastor came to see him.

The man welcomed him at the door and said, “Pastor, you are certainly welcome to come in – but there isn’t anything you can say that will change my mind.”

Even so, he came in and sat down in front of a merrily burning fire that was in the fireplace.

They watched in silence for a while and then the pastor got up and taking some tongs, moved one of the burning logs off the pile and set it aside. It burned for a while but gradually turned into just a charred lump of heated coals.

Still, they said nothing. Then the pastor got back up and put that log back on the fire and almost immediately it burst back into flame.

As he got up to leave, the man got up with the pastor, took his hand and said, “I heard your message. I will see you next Sunday. Thank you.”

becoming a person of faith ... fully committed to being the Lord’s person in a world that celebrates our uncertainties and our lack of faith requires that we be in community with others.

If we insist on going it alone we will assuredly turn into cold, lonely and lifeless shadows of what we could be.

... let us pray ...

John 20.19-31
N.I.V. Reader’s Version

On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together. They had locked the doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Jesus came in and stood among them. He said, “May peace be with you!” Then he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were very happy when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, “May peace be with you! The Father has sent me. So now I am sending you.” He then breathed on them. He said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Thomas was one of the 12 disciples. He was also called Didymus. He was not with the other disciples when Jesus came. So they told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “First I must see the nail marks in his hands. I must put my finger where the nails were. I must put my hand into his side. Only then will I believe.”

A week later, Jesus’ disciples were in the house again. Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came in and stood among them. He said, “May peace be with you!” 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.”

Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen me but still have believed.”