

INTRODUCTION

I want to thank you for the way you have made adjustments during COVID. I've said before, I'm grateful to God that we have built so much square footage, because it allows us to spread out. And the word is that everyone is spreading out. You've heard of the freshman fifteen weight gain, now we have the COVID-19.

I've had a lot of people say they can't wait for 2020 to end. I saw a funny picture from the movie *Back to the Future*. Dr. Brown is in the DeLorean saying, "Listen carefully, Marty. Whatever you do, don't set it to 2020!"

We've had a lot of bad news this year, but I have some good news. There are three words that enable us to rejoice in the midst of our trials and tribulations. These three amazing words change our perspective on COVID, the election, and everything else. The three words are: JESUS IS ALIVE. All biographies end with a death and burial, the story of Jesus continues. He is alive and He is alive forevermore. Let's go back to John 20 and read about what happened on that first Easter evening, and then what happened a week later.

John 20:19-29. When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you." After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (called "Twin"), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were telling him, "We've seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe."

A week later his disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe." Thomas responded to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

A lot of people have nicknames. For instance, I'll give the nicknames of some famous sports stars and you see if you can identify them. Basketball: Dr. J. (Julius Irving); Air Jordan (Michael Jordan); The Round Mound of Rebound (Charles Barkley) Golf: The Golden Bear (Jack Nicklaus); Great White Shark (Greg Norman); The King (Arnold Palmer); Football: The Bus

(Jerome Pettis) Prime Time (Deon Sanders); Broadway Joe (Joe Namath), he has a second career selling Medicare supplements.

Of all the disciples, Thomas is the only one who received a nickname. What was it? Doubting Thomas. I don't agree. I prefer to call him Honest Thomas, according to this passage, he already had a nickname, the Twin.

Last week we read in Mark 16 that when Mary Magdalene reported to the ten disciples that she had seen the Lord, they didn't believe her. It wasn't until Jesus showed up on that first Easter night that they believed.

So, let's call him Honest Thomas. And there are three important life lessons that we can learn from what happened on that second Easter evening.

1. THOMAS MISSED THE APPEARANCE OF JESUS.

Let's go back to that first Easter evening for a moment. The disciples were hiding behind closed doors, and they were full of sorrow and grief. Without knocking, or using the door, Jesus stood in their midst. In His Resurrected body, He didn't have to knock, He could pass through matter and appear and disappear. Jesus appeared and said, "Shalom." Luke tells us they were so frightened they were looking for a window to jump out of; they thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus invited them to examine him and touch Him. He said, "Does a ghost have flesh and bones?" Then they started rejoicing. But Thomas missed the party.

So where was he? The Bible doesn't say. He could have been with Mrs. Thomas. Peter had a wife who is never named, so it stands to reason that some of the other disciples were married. Or Thomas could have been grieving on his own. Some people prefer to grieve alone, and others want to be with people.

For whatever reason, Thomas spent an entire week missing out on what the other disciples had. He missed the peace Jesus had given them. He missed the presence of Jesus and the prayer for them to receive the Holy Spirit. He missed Jesus' command to go out into the world. In his mind, Jesus was still dead and buried.

Life Lesson: When you isolate yourself from other believers, you miss God's blessings.

Have you ever wondered why we worship on Sunday? It is the first day of the week—the day Jesus appeared to the disciples. In the New Testament, it's called the Lord's Day.

Think about the measuring of time. Days, months, and years are determined by the orbit and rotation of the earth in relation to the sun.

But it was God who gave us the week. He took six days to create everything, and He rested the seventh Day. That influence among the Jewish people who gave us the Bible is source of our

seven-day week. The Jews didn't have names for the days, except the Sabbath Day. They called the other days, the first day, the second day, etc.

The Romans had an eight-day week until the Third Century A.D. when Constantine adopted a seven-day week and declared Sunday to be a day when people could worship and rest. Our English words for the days of the week are actually a mish-mash of ancient Greek and Roman Gods along with the Germanic influence on language. For instance, Sun-day is named for the sun. Monday is moon-day. Tuesday is named after the German name for the Roman God of war, Mars, which is Tui, and so on.

But there is a powerful meaning to the first day of the week that changed when Jesus was resurrected. The tomb was discovered to be empty on the First Day of the week, Sunday. And Jesus first appeared to the disciples on Sunday, which later became known as "the Lord's Day." It never became the Christian Sabbath, instead that is the reason our primary day of worship is on Sunday. Our secular society considers Sunday to be a part of the weekend. But according to the Bible, this is the first day of the week.

One of the great blessings of my life was to be able to be a part of creating a digital library of my friend and predecessor, Paul Powell. Every morning I read at least two devotionals, Jim Denison's Daily the daily devotional from Paul's Legacy Library. Last week he wrote about the days of the week. He wrote: "Think about what the days of the week would be like without God. Sindy, Mournday, Tearsday, Wasteday, Thirstday, Fightday, and Shatterday. Remember that seven days without God makes one weak!" But Sunday is the first day of the week when we gather to celebrate the resurrection!

The Bible speaks about the blessing of gathering together. Hebrews 10:25 NLT says, "And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."

Of course, COVID has changed our gathering patterns. I don't think we'll ever forget the disappointment we experienced last spring when we realized that for the sake of health and safety, we wouldn't be gathering together on the Lord's Day. We went ten weeks of having only virtual worship services until we gathered in the parking lot the last day of May. Since then, God has graciously allowed us to gather even while we maintain precautions to prevent the spread of COVID.

While we had our building closed, the church was still alive and well, but I really missed gathering with you to do as the Psalmist wrote: "Oh, magnify the Lord with me; and let us exalt His name together." There's great power in the word TOGETHER. Since we've regathered I've noticed a new spirit in worship. There are times when we sing when I can't keep the tears from filling my eyes. There is just something special about gathering with the Lord's people on the Lord's Day. And it's more important to gather now than ever before, because we are closer to the return of Jesus.

We draw strength from God and from each other. If you are watching on television, I urge you wait until you feel safe to return. Just so you know, even with adequate spacing, we still have ample room for several hundred more people to return to worship and connect groups.

But the one thing I pray won't happen to any of you is that you lose the *desire* to gather with us, that you get out the habit. Like Thomas, if you isolate yourself, you will miss out of some of God's greatest blessings.

2. THOMAS DEMANDED PROOF ABOUT JESUS.

We don't know how long it was after Jesus left that Thomas showed up. It could have been later that evening, or later that week. All we know is that when the disciples told him, he didn't believe. John 20:25 CSB says, "But he said to them, 'If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe.'" Later when Jesus appeared we read in verse 27: "Then Jesus said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe.'"

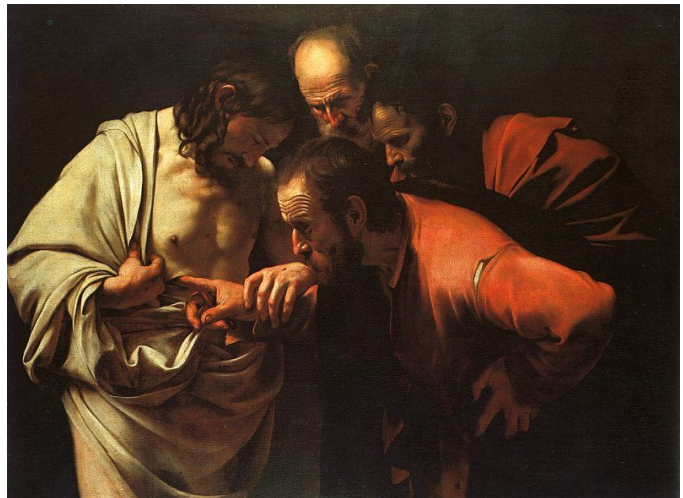
When seminary students study Greek, we pay attention to this passage because it is a great example of a double negative in Greek. In English, a double negative is bad. I had a teacher that said, "Don't never use a double negative. But in the Greek language, it only piles up the meaning. Thomas said, if I don't put my hand in His side, I will not, no never, believe."

Jesus approached Thomas and held out his hand. "Go ahead, take your finger and stick it through my hand." He pulled up his robe and said, "Here, put your hand in this gash. Drop your faithfulness and believe."

One of my favorite Italian artists was Caravaggio. He has painted this scene of Jesus and Thomas. A replica of this painting is hanging in CrossWalk in our Life of Christ gallery. In this painting, Jesus used his left hand, with a nail print visible, to thrust Thomas' finger into His wounded side. Thomas eyes are wide open in surprise, as the other two disciples look on with fascination.

Life Lesson: When you consider the wounds of Jesus, you understand His love.

Just as Jesus invited Thomas to examine His wounds, I think we should consider His invitation as well.



The Incredulity of Saint Thomas
Caravaggio
Oil on Canvas, c. 1601-1602

Here's a bit of trivia for you if you want to start a conversation about Jesus. The question is: What is the only manmade thing in Heaven? Give up? The wounds of Jesus. Jesus visited earth and when He returned to heaven, He took some souvenirs of His visit with him. Those souvenirs are the scars in His hands and the scar in His side. He has kept those scars as a lasting memorial of His humanity through all eternity.

His wounds are precious to us, and they are a testimony of His great love for us. Later Peter would write in 1 Peter 2:24 CSB: "He himself bore our sin in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."

When the Apostle John had a vision of Heaven in Revelation 6, he describes a lamb on a throne and he described it as a lamb that had been slain. I love the old Hymn, Crown Him with many Crowns. One of the verses says, "Crown Him the Lord of Love, Behold His hands and side. Those wounds yet visible above, in beauty glorified."

When Jesus comes again, one of the ways that He will be recognized will be by the wounds in His body. In Zechariah 12 and 13, the prophet is describing the Day of the Lord, when Jesus returns triumphant in battle. On that day God will pour out a spirit of grace on the house of David and the Bible says they will look upon the one they have pierced. And they will mourn and ask, "What are these wounds in your hands." And the Messiah will say, "These are the wounds I received in the house of my friends." His wounds are for our healing and forgiveness.

A woman was in the hospital and her condition was terminal. This dear woman had walked faithfully with the Lord for many years. A hospital chaplain visited her and asked, "Madam, would you like for me to administer last rites and forgive your sins?" The woman said, "Please, can I see your hands?" The chaplain held out his hands. The lady said, "The lady said, 'Sir, thank you for your offer, but the only one who has the power to forgive my sins has nail prints in His hands, and He has already forgiven me.'"

My friend, every scar has a story. I have a few scars from surgery's and wounds, and you do too. And every scar has a story. The story of the scars of Jesus is a love story. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down His life for His friends.

3. THOMAS MADE A DISCOVERY ABOUT JESUS.

Remember Caravaggio's painting? He took some artistic license by portraying Thomas' finger probing the wound in Jesus' side. The Bible doesn't say that he followed through on his demand for proof. Maybe he did, or maybe he simply fell to his knees in worship. We read in John 20:28: "Thomas responded to him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.'" Whatever happened, faith came flooding into Thomas' heart. The skeptic became a believer.

I can recall years ago hearing a country preacher preach on Thomas. He had three points that I can still remember: Thomas pouting. Thomas doubting. And Thomas shouting.

We don't know if he was pouting or doubting, but when he saw Jesus he was shouting, "MY LORD, AND MY GOD."

Life Lesson: When you see who Jesus really is, you will worship Him as God.

Thomas didn't just claim to believe in the risen Christ, but he recognized the deity of Jesus. He said, "My Lord, and my God." Thomas addressed Jesus as God. And Jesus accepted that title. He didn't say, "Hold on there, Tommy, I'm your Lord, but I'm not your God." We must also recognize Jesus as God and worship Him as God.

Jesus wasn't just a good Jewish teacher. As we have studied through John's account, over and over Jesus identified Himself as the great I AM. The name God gave to Moses at the burning bush. Jesus claimed to be alive before Abraham. He said, "Before Abraham was, I am." Only God can make a statement like that.

That second Easter night Jesus said something about us. He said, "Thomas you believe because you have seen." Then He looked ahead over 21 centuries to those of us gathered here today and He said, "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believe."

Let me take a brief survey by the show of hands. How many of you have literally seen the risen Christ with the eyes in your head? I didn't think so. But how many of you believe that Jesus is alive? You see Him with the eyes of your heart—and Jesus pronounced a blessing on you.

History is full of seekers like Thomas who investigated and became believers. The last time Thomas' name appears in the Bible is in Acts 1 where he is listed with the other disciples in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost. Church history reports that Thomas went to current day India to spread the Gospel. He preached for twenty years until he was martyred. Today, the patron saint of India is St. Thomas. And when the Dutch Trading Company landed on an island in the Caribbean, they named it Saint Thomas and established the St. Thomas Church there. So Honest Thomas had a great impact on God's Kingdom.

CONCLUSION

Have you come to the place where you can say like Thomas, "My Lord and My God?" For Thomas, it was personal. He didn't say, "You're the Lord and the God." He said, "MY Lord and MY God." People often refer to the Lord or they talk about the Man upstairs, but true faith is when you can say, "Jesus is MY Lord and MY God."

Jesus is holding out His hands to you today, inviting you to come to Him. Will you do it?

The year was 1924, and there was a revival being held at First Baptist Church, Allen, Texas. That evening, as the evangelist gave the invitation, he said, "Won't you come forward tonight and place your hand in the nail-scarred hand?" The man leading the music was B.B. McKinney. Later that night during a Texas thunderstorm, McKinney wrote the words to a beloved hymn. His words are your invitation from God today: "Have you failed in your plan for your storm-

tossed life? Place your hand in the nail-scarred hand. Are you weary and worn from its toil and strife? Place your hand in the nail-scarred hand. The chorus says: He will keep 'til the end. He's your dearest friend. Place your hand in the nail-scarred hand."

OUTLINE

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Life Lesson: When you isolate yourself from other believers, you miss God's blessings.

"And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." *Hebrews 10:25 NLT*

2. THOMAS DEMANDED PROOF ABOUT JESUS.

"But he said to them, 'If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe.'" *John 20:25 CSB*

"Then Jesus said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe.'" *John 20:27 CSB*

Life Lesson: When you consider the wounds of Jesus, you understand His love.

"He himself bore our sin in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." *1 Peter 1:8-9 CSB*

3. THOMAS MADE A DISCOVERY ABOUT JESUS.

"Thomas responded to him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.'" *John 20:28 CSB*

Life Lesson: When you see who Jesus really is, you will worship Him as God.

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes