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The Risen Jesus Confronts Our Doubts

Introduction:

For the benefit of those of you who were on retreat this past Sunday, I announced then my diverting from our study of 1 John in order to examine the appearances of the risen Lord Jesus to his disciples as recorded in John's Gospel, in sermons that take us through Pentecost. Last Sunday we noted Jesus' appearance in the Upper Room in to give his commission to the disciples. The event for today took place on the Sunday after the first Easter, a week after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This event we will consider is actually the climax and conclusion to the Gospel according to John, chapter 21 being an epilogue. We will note that the disciple Thomas provides a climactic confession for John's Gospel, which was written, as we see in verses 30 and 31, to encourage faith in Jesus.

On that first Easter night, the evening of the day when Jesus arose from the grave, Jesus appeared perhaps to the ten disciples, all except Thomas, and Judas, of course. That resurrection night the disciples were gathered in the Upper Room, that place where the Lord had instituted his New Covenant supper with them prior to his crucifixion. The disciples were overjoyed to see the risen Lord, who gave them their commission to continue his work of the kingdom (John 20:19-23). Thomas was absent from this first Easter Sunday experience, and, as we will see in our text, was not of a mind to believe his colleagues had actually seen the Lord in the flesh.

Follow as I read **John 20:24-31**.

We are all familiar with the epithet, “Doubting Thomas.” We use this term to describe anyone who has a skeptical bent, and it is almost always used in a derogatory way. *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* has the entry, “doubting Thomas,” as “a habitually doubtful person.” And, in fact, the first impression our text gives us of Thomas is not a very favorable one. But as we consider the entire text, we will gain perhaps a new appreciation for Thomas. More importantly, we will hopefully be able to identify with Thomas in our personal struggles with doubts and our growth toward a mature faith.

Thomas is an easy target because he is alone in his doubt. The other disciples were together on Resurrection Sunday and were privileged to see the Lord in his appearance to them, commissioning of them, and breathing the Holy Spirit into them. For whatever reason, Thomas was not there. Had almost any of the others not been there, they too might have been doubters until they had seen Jesus for themselves. Thomas seemed to have some admirable qualities we do well to emulate. In John 11, Thomas, misunderstanding the words of Jesus about the death of Lazarus and the need to “go to him,” expressed a willingness to join Lazarus in death (John 11:16). Thomas may have been a bit slow and obtuse, yet he was nobly brave and devoted. And, when Jesus spoke of his imminent departure to prepare a place for his disciples, Thomas expressed his bewilderment about where Jesus was going, and asked, “How can we know the way?” (John 14:5). Thomas loved the Lord Jesus and wanted to be with him forever.

Most who study Thomas’ character conclude that he was of a melancholy disposition. He was a pessimist, who tended to see the glass as “half empty instead of half full.” And his pessimism may have contributed to his being absent from the gathering of the disciples when Jesus appeared on that first Easter Sunday evening. He may have been alone, sulking and brooding over his ominous future, following the death of his Lord. His absenteeism was an obvious factor. Had he been there on that Resurrection night, he would not have been “the doubter of the week.” For whatever reasons, Thomas was at least a temporary doubter, and the narrative of his experience is a great lesson to us, revealing the transition from doubt to faith.

In the narrative which is today’s text I want you to note with me the stages through which Thomas passed to arrive at a confident and triumphant confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Let’s note that the first stage in Thomas’ coming to faith was...

The admission of doubt

In verses 24 & 25, Thomas’ reaction to the testimony of the other disciples reads like a typical expression of the Age of Enlightenment, of the modern scientific age: “I won’t believe till I see it,” or “Give me proof and I’ll believe.”

Kent Hughes says he’s not so sure this is the world’s view. It’s more like, “Show me the facts, and I’ll invent another theory” (Kent Hughes, page 457, *John: That You*

May Believe). To illustrate his point, Hughes tells of the extent to which so-called intellectual people have gone to discredit the overwhelming evidence of the resurrection of Jesus. He uses as an example Hugh Schonfeld's *The Passover Plot* (1965), which propounds the incredible theory that Jesus didn't really die on the cross, but rather swooned and was revived. According to the swoon theory, Jesus was unconscious when placed in the tomb, and then was revived by the scent of the embalming spices and the cool dampness of the tomb.

Aside from ignoring the text, says Hughes, this theory creates more questions than it answers. Any reading of the text renders this theory absurd. But even apart from the text, how could you explain the existence of the church apart from Jesus' actual resurrection? Those early disciples would hardly have converted from their fear and doubt into men and women willing to suffer and die for the gospel if they were perpetrating a hoax. If Jesus were not who he claimed to be as King of kings and the eternal Son of God, then he was a fraud and a deceiver.

We are in fact no longer living in the modern age of demanding scientific proof, but ours is the New Age of credulity and accepting everything as true without examination. That's why marketing and advertising are having a heyday. Just repeat a message enough on television or radio and people will begin to think they actually need, desire or believe something. Ironically, there is credulity and readiness to believe the faddish, though biblical truth is often the exception. People are afraid if they accept the Bible as normative they will become intolerant and narrow-minded. So, Christian faith is the one ideology not tolerated by the so-called tolerant!

Thomas' reaction to the testimony of the other disciples at first shows an almost modern proclivity to unbelief, but on closer inspection we see his doubt was temporary, and we realize...

We've all been there.

Os Guinness, disciple of and successor to the late Francis Schaeffer in his ministry with L'Abri Fellowship International, wrote years ago a book about the pilgrimage from doubt to faith, titled *In Two Minds: The Dilemma of Doubt and How to Resolve It* (1976). In this book he explains that the word "doubt" is from the Latin "dubitare," which means "two." To believe is to be in one mind. To disbelieve is to be in one mind also, the mind to reject a certain truth. To doubt is to waver between the two minds, and to be in a state of "double-ness," or "two-ness." Hopefully, this state of mind called doubt is a temporary one, and a stage of transition from unbelief to faith. I believe that doubt is a necessary experience in the pilgrimage of faith. As Guinness says, only God and certain madmen have no doubts.

Doubt is that experience of considering something, asking questions, and then moving beyond that doubt to new certainty. We don't get bogged down in doubt that hardens into militant unbelief, nor do we say we believe something without giving it serious consideration. I'm afraid there are many in the membership of the church today who have not given one serious thought to the verity of the faith. They simply went along with the decision of others. That's why they can give no scriptural defense or explanation of what they believe. That's also why they are vulnerable to

the inroads of heretical teaching promulgated by the cults. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses will tell you their most fertile field for new converts are members of evangelical churches, and especially the ones of my former denomination. Many have never thought through the truth claims of Christ and the Word, and thus cannot discern the error of these false teachings.

Cults, like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, seek to remove the mystery from the faith, and answer the Bible's unanswerable questions with their extra-biblical sources, such as the Book of Mormon and Watchtower publications. Those who are soft in faith and have never looked deeply into biblical truth and mystery are credulous and vulnerable to those who have so-called answers, even if they are the wrong ones.

The Christian faith demands that we believe what we cannot see with our eyes. Hebrews 11:1 says "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Faith is taking God at his word with no evidence other than his Word. But though we believe without seeing, we do not believe without considering (FF Bruce). Faith is not blind credulity and unthinking naiveté. God has given us his Word to read and to hear, and we are to consider his truth with our best thinking. As Peter writes, we are to, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks (us) to give *the reason* for the hope that (we) have" (1 Peter 3:15). I believe Thomas had a desire to consider the truth of Jesus' resurrection.

Admittedly, some people have a greater inclination to doubt, just as some find it easier to believe. I was nurtured in the faith as a child, and my conversion came without a lot of struggle with doubt. My struggles came later, in high school and college, as I confronted ideas and issues that made me reexamine my faith. I was often in two minds, and had to resolve doubts. But that was the way I grew in faith and understanding.

Some by natural disposition tend to have more doubts than others do. Thomas seemed to be of a melancholy disposition. Consider how he may have dealt with his grief. Unlike the other disciples who banded together after their Lord was crucified, seeking consolation and maybe protection from one another, Thomas must have gone off into a corner by himself to deal with his grief in solitude. In John's Gospel we see that Thomas was pessimistic by disposition, yet fiercely loyal (John 11:16; 14:5). He tended to look on the dark side of things, and naturally would struggle more with doubt than those of a more optimistic and cheerful disposition.

I remember a deacon in a church we served in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, USA. This good man was from Tennessee, and had difficulty finding anything good about Cleveland, especially about its weather. He tended to see the dark side of just about anything. It was early spring, about this time of the year. We were finally beginning to pull out of a typically long, harsh and dreary winter. This particular Sunday morning, and I believe it was Easter Sunday, was unusually beautiful, sunny and warm. As I approached Cody in the hallway that morning, I thought, "What negative thing could he possibly say about this glorious day?" So, I said to him as cheerily as I could, "Good morning, Cody. It's a great day, isn't it?" "Yeah," he admitted begrudgingly. "But we'll pay for it tomorrow!" Poor fellow, he couldn't enjoy today for dreading tomorrow. But, thankfully, Cody Williams overcame his tendency to

pessimism and doubt, and was a believer in the Lord Jesus, by the grace of God. I believe all true believers have spent some time in a state of doubt, and some more than others. But...

We shouldn't live there.

Doubt is not the opposite of belief and faith. Doubt can work with faith, as we question the evidence and move on to greater faith. Unbelief, not doubt, is the opposite of faith/belief. Someone has said that doubt can exist alongside faith just as fear can exist alongside courage. The opposite of courage is not fear. You can be a courageous person and still have the emotion of fear. But your courage will enable you to act, even with fear, and eventually to overcome your fears. The opposite of courage is cowardice, which immobilizes and freezes its victims in inaction. In the same way, doubt is not the opposite of faith. And with faith one moves on, even with nagging doubts, and as one moves forward, eventually doubts are resolved. But unless doubts are resolved, one falls into unbelief, which quenches faith, just as fear could eventually quench courage and lead to cowardice.

G Gordon Liddy was one of the co-conspirators in the Watergate scandal in the US that led to the resignation of then President Richard Nixon. Liddy, who served a 4-year prison term for his part in the crime, became a radio talk show host, and is an unusual character by anyone's assessment. To overcome his fear of rats, he shot and ate a rat! Now he no longer fears them. This odd behavior of Liddy is an apt, if distasteful, illustration for overcoming doubts. We shouldn't let them disturb us. We should go after them, and kill them, and benefit from them, as we grow in faith.

Though we have all been there with Thomas, we must not live there. We must move from the mind to disbelieve to the mind to believe. To remain in a state of doubt is to become hardened in unbelief.

The truth of the resurrection of Jesus and the Christian faith is reasonable and rational truth. As Kent Hughes says, we are not a ship of fools. And as New Testament scholar NT Wright says, the idea that faith must never have anything to do with history is "long overdue a decent burial" (page 716, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*). We are familiar with the historical evidence for the resurrection, and how that the truth of Jesus' appearing to his disciples in an actual, physical body is what propelled them to fulfill the Great Commission, even at the cost of their lives. Like the first disciples, including Thomas, we are to move beyond the state of questioning and considering and being in two minds about a matter.

The Chinese have a parable about doubt as the futile attempt to have one's feet in two boats. Sooner or later you have to commit to one boat or the other, because eventually they will take you in different directions. To doubt is to delay, to hesitate between two opinions, and one who remains in doubt will eventually drown in the depths of unbelief.

Thomas' first stage in his faith pilgrimage was his admission of doubt, saying, "Unless I see I will not believe." But, thank God, he didn't stay there. He moved on to the next stage, which was...

The acceptance of evidence

The evidence for faith is what we see in verses 26, 27 and 29. We note that as with Thomas and for us...

God brings it.

How graciously the Lord accommodated himself to Thomas' doubt by making this special appearance the following Sunday night, in the same place and the same manner as he did the week before! Just as with the other disciples on Easter Sunday night, Jesus did not come to them and say, "Shame on you!" He said to disciples who had forsaken and denied him, "Peace be with you." Jesus once again miraculously appeared in the locked room and spoke these gracious words. Jesus appeared this time specifically to meet Thomas' previously stated criterion for belief—that he put his hand into Jesus' scars in his hands and side. The text does not say that Thomas put his hands into Jesus' scars. Seeing Jesus was enough for Thomas, who responded to Jesus with his worshipful confession of faith.

Jesus then said that those of us after the time of these eyewitnesses would be blessed by our faith in the unseen (29). But by that Jesus did not mean our faith would be apart from his revelation, which is the evidence we need for faith. As Paul said, the word of Christ preached and proclaimed would be the means by which subsequent generations would come to faith (Romans 10:17). The evidence God brings to us is the evidence in his convincing word about Jesus.

You recall how the religious leaders tried to coerce Jesus into performing impressive miracles to prove himself to them. But Jesus knew their hearts were unwilling to believe even when he gave sign miracles. Jesus said the only sign they would be given would be the sign of Jonah, which is the evidence of Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial in the grave for three days, followed by his resurrection (Matthew 12:38).

The disciples and Thomas had the unique experience of seeing Jesus in the flesh, and even of experiencing his full humanity, though now he was in his resurrection body. Jesus' was resurrected with an immortal body, but it was not as a spirit that he was resurrected. His risen body was material, visible, tangible, and palpable. Yes, he could appear with a thought, and was no longer limited by time and space as he was during his 33 years of incarnation before the resurrection. Though different from his mortal body, his resurrection body was real, as real as our bodies.

Jesus said after Thomas' confession of faith that Thomas believed because he had seen, but blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. He's referring to us. God brings us evidence of the gospel through the Word. It is not a word about something mystical, but is the Word of God about his dealings in human history and about God's becoming a man in Jesus. It is a word about events that happened on this earth at a particular time in real history—Jesus' life, suffering, death, and resurrection. It is the Word calling us to confess and repent of sin, and believe in Jesus and follow him as Lord. This Word that brings salvation is as real and as close and as life-changing as the presence of the resurrection body of Jesus there in that Upper Room (Romans 10: 14-17).

Peter writes in his first letter, “For you have been born again...through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23).

God brings the evidence we need for faith in Jesus. He gives us the evidence of the Word and the testimony of believers. Note: the testimony of the other disciples was not enough to convince Thomas, but their encouragement gave him hope and led him to the place of encounter the next Sunday.

This is a reminder to us who are believers that God uses us to lovingly and patiently bring with us those who are doubters and maybe even cynics. We should not be fearful of or impatient with those who seem to be open to the truth, and who ask us hard and even offensive questions. Rather, we must be faithful in our witness, hopeful in our praying, and loving in our leading them to the place where they will hear a saving word from God. The other disciples apparently didn’t condemn Thomas, but quietly said to themselves, “You’ll see for yourself and believe as we do.”

I think of the way this church encouraged Ian Russell during the many years he attended IBC as an unbeliever. You welcomed Ian to participate in worship, home groups and even church members’ meetings as an unbeliever, who questioned the verity of the Bible from his scientific, humanistic perspective. Yet you didn’t shun him. You prayed for him and discussed with him and witnessed to him. After I arrived as your pastor eight and a half years ago, I developed a good relationship with Ian, who invited me to his home for extensive discussions on the matter of science and faith and the credibility of the Gospel. God moved in his heart, and he came to faith and, as you know, testified of his faith by believer’s baptism on Easter Sunday of 2004. Ian went to be with the Lord the following year. One of his last requests given to his beloved wife, Zosia, was that at his memorial service the chorus “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” be sung. We must not just tolerate doubters, but love them and seek to lead them to meet Jesus for themselves.

God brings the evidence through his Word and by his witnesses, and then, like Thomas...

We receive it.

When Jesus appeared and spoke to Thomas, he received this evidence with faith as well as with sight. I remind you that even at the last minute, on the Mount of Ascension, while most were worshiping the Risen Lord who gave the Great Commission, “some doubted” (Matthew 28:17). Some doubted when they saw Jesus raise Lazarus (John 11:45ff; 12:9-19). Even overwhelming “in your face” evidence can be rejected and explained away by a heart set on unbelief.

Some people make a career out of doubt and become obdurate unbelievers. Such people often say they are “looking for God,” and they are looking for God about like I’m looking for the flu every winter, in the hope I don’t catch it. I find that most who say they cannot believe are actually unwilling to believe. The problem is not usually intellectual. God can reveal himself and his truth to the intellect, if we are open to

him. The problem is with the heart. There is usually an unwillingness to surrender to the lordship of Christ, who demands our repentance of sin.

Someone said that Thomas' problem was not so much his doubt as it was his absenteeism. In fact, Scripture tells us that faith doesn't come about apart from evidence, but rather through the preaching and hearing of the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). Had he been with them on that first Easter Sunday night, he also would have believed. Faith is encouraged in the context of corporate worship, when we hear the word preached and sense the power of the presence of God (1 Corinthians 14:24f).

The late great pastor of The Westminster Chapel in London, D Martin Lloyd-Jones, used to say that you never know what you're going to miss if you don't attend worship. "You know, we pray for revival, we pray for the outpouring of God's Spirit, and one day that will come, in the way it came in phenomenal fashion in the middle of the eighteenth century. It came again in the middle of the nineteenth century. It could come, and you're not here. And you'd be kicking yourself for the rest of your life," said Lloyd-Jones (quoted by Ligon Duncan on the web site: www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons).

Faith is awakened in the minds and hearts of those who are willing to consider the evidence. The evidence comes through the Word and by the Holy Spirit, working through the preaching and teaching of the Word, and confirmed in the testimony of believers. Faith, in other words, is nurtured in the teaching and preaching of the Bible. Those who absent themselves from Bible study and worship are growing weaker in faith.

Jesus literally said to Thomas, "Stop becoming unbelieving, and start becoming believing" (AT Robertson, volume IV, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*).

We have the opportunity to encounter Jesus daily and moment by moment, and in a special way he is present in the assembly of his people. He comes to encourage our faith, and anytime we willingly forsake worship, personally and corporately, we grow weaker in faith (Hebrews 10:25). We become less believing and more unbelieving. Like Thomas did, we miss out on seeing and experiencing the inspiring, directing Lord.

In his pilgrimage of faith, Thomas had his admission of doubt, and moved on to his acceptance of the evidence for faith. The final stage of his experience was...

The assurance of faith

In verse 28 Thomas' faith sounds forth with joyous assurance.

We all know the skeptic's motto, "seeing is believing." That was the demand that Thomas had made early on in our text. But when the Lord appeared to him, he responded with faith, and was thereby enabled to see/perceive something known only by faith, and that is the significance of the person of Jesus. Sense perception is not enough. When Thomas experienced the Lord Jesus, he was given grace to

believe. He didn't even need to touch the wounds, a criterion he had earlier demanded. On the other hand, without grace to believe, it's possible to see overwhelming evidence and still not believe. But, for Thomas and for all people of faith, "believing is seeing." Thomas' seeing was met with God-given faith, which enabled him to make the great confession of faith.

Thomas moved beyond mere sight to spiritual insight. Someone noted that Thomas, who was absent and truant from that all-important first class session with the Risen Lord, in this second session, "shot to the head of the class" with his magnificent confession of faith (Rodney Whitaker, *Commentary on John*, IVP).

Notice, first of all, that Thomas' assurance of faith came...

By the confession of faith

Thomas was no longer the doubter as he exclaimed, "My *Lord* and my *God!*" That expression was the highest Christology ("one of the great Christological confessions of the New Testament," DA Carson), declaring that Jesus of Nazareth is God in the flesh, and the sovereign Lord of the universe. What a statement of faith it was, directed toward the one who was crucified in total weakness and shame. Yet now he says Jesus is Lord over the religious and political empires that crucified him about ten days before. God-given faith alone allows us to believe that the Jesus who was crucified in weakness is now the risen, reigning Lord and God. Thomas didn't come to faith in a Savior who would overthrow the Romans with political might. He didn't come to faith in one who would bring an immediate overthrow of outward powers and personal problems.

Grace alone leads us to believe in and follow the Crucified, the one who saved us by his suffering and death, and who calls us to take this same path of weakness, suffering and death to self. Saving faith is a great work of grace, overcoming unbelief and pride.

As has been noted, doubters and skeptics, when converted, make great believers. I think not only of Thomas, but also of Augustine, John Newton, CS Lewis and the late Charles Colson. CH Spurgeon said that were he ever on trial, he would like to have Thomas as a witness in his behalf.

Now Thomas is a passionate believer, having gone through his period of doubt, and being by nature a pessimist. Thomas not only believed in the resurrection of Jesus, but now he believed in all his claims. It is not enough just to believe he arose, but that he lives as Lord and God. There were those who saw Jesus raise Lazarus, the widow's son, and the daughter of Jairus, but they did not believe in Jesus as Lord. Thomas, on the other hand, believed in and committed himself unreservedly to Jesus as Lord and God.

In the early church, the first baptismal confession was "Jesus is Lord." This was for many a costly confession. It meant they could not and would not say, "Caesar is Lord," because there can be only one Lord.

Today there are many who are making this confession, and for them it is costly. We daily read press releases about the persecution of Christians in Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Northern Nigerian and in other African countries. All over the world there are those who are being persecuted and martyred because of this simple confession—"Jesus is Lord."

But notice also, Thomas' assurance of faith came...

By the possession of faith

Thomas said with unequivocal conviction, "My Lord and my God!"

Believing about Jesus is not enough. James says the demons also believe in one God, and tremble (James 2:19). Faith that saves and keeps and that grows and serves is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. So, the dynamic term is used, "Stop keeping on doubting and start keeping on believing" (verse 27). And this is done by knowing Jesus and walking with him in a faith relationship.

Too many nominal Christians make a profession of faith and do not have a *possession of faith*.

Not only did Thomas possess Jesus. Jesus possessed Thomas.

Tradition says that Thomas became an apostolic missionary, taking the gospel to India (*International Dictionary of the Christian Church*). He became one who believed in and loved Jesus as his Lord and as his Savior.

Peter writes in his first epistle, "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9).

That's the beatitude Jesus gave to us in verse 29 of our text. By grace we are enabled to believe in Jesus, whom we cannot see. But when we believe in him through the Word, we know his joy and have assurance of our salvation. As DA Carson says, Jesus' words in verse 29 and 1 Peter 1:8-9 assure us that for those of us who believe without seeing, "our joy is not truncated" (*The Gospel According to John*, page 656). Our faith is not by seeing, but comes through hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17).

My evangelical tradition has always emphasized "the security of the believer," and has quickly countered challenges to our assurance of salvation with the cliché, "Once saved, always saved." Assurance is important, but we must be on guard against presumption. Though we should never doubt God, we should be willing to examine ourselves to make certain we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

One way we are to maintain assurance is by making our calling and election sure, and the way Peter says we are to do this is not by quoting a cliché or by producing a baptismal certificate, but by growing in the virtues of godliness (2 Peter 1:10). As we

walk in step with the Spirit and allow him to work in our lives and give us sweet fellowship with Jesus, there is a growth in assurance.

This confession of Thomas serves as the true climax to John's Gospel, with chapter 21 being an epilogue. And in verse 31 John states the purpose of the Gospel, that his readers "May continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah" (*New Living Translation*). It's interesting that some of the Greek manuscripts use the present tense "continue to believe," "indicating that John wrote to encourage believers. Other manuscripts read that you may come to believe, suggesting that John wrote to stimulate new faith" (Gary M Burge, *NLT Study Bible*, notes on John, page 1816). Whatever the tense, faith is not a one-time event, but a lifelong experience, requiring growth in assurance.

Luther said the Holy Spirit is not a skeptic. When someone is willing to receive the evidence of Scripture, and is open to the work of the Holy Spirit, who will lead us into all truth, then doubts will be resolved and greater faith and assurance will be the result. And the presence of the Holy Spirit authenticates our faith in God's word (1 John 3:24).

It seems that some of the most devoted believers I know contend with periods of serious spiritual struggle and doubt. And sometimes even toward the end of their lives, when you would think they would have "outgrown" any doubts, they might be deprived of the emotional support that they received perhaps as when young in the faith. But these giants in faith always cling to Christ and to his word, and like Abraham, "against all hope... in hope believed" (Romans 4:18). Faith eventually sets our hearts at rest in his presence, "for God is greater than our hearts" (1 John 3:19f).

Conclusion:

I have heard people reject the message of the gospel and the offer of eternal life, saying, "I'm just a doubting Thomas." Have you said that? Well, Thomas doubted for only a week. Your weeks are over. It's now five Sundays after Easter. Jesus says, "Stop doubting and believe." Thomas the Doubter became Thomas the Missionary, all because he admitted his doubt, accepted the evidence, and came into the subsequent assurance of faith.

Now you have the witness of the church and the Word of God, which has been presented with the power of the Holy Spirit. As really as if Jesus were standing before you, with outstretched hands with the nail scars, so Jesus is before us through the Word.

Paul says that this confession that Thomas made cannot be made apart from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). So, in your heart and with your mouth can you say with me this morning these words:

"My Lord and my God!"

This may be the first time you have said this with true faith, conviction and worship. You may have made a profession of faith as a church member, but you have never experienced the possession of a personal faith in Jesus Christ. The faith to which John's Gospel calls us is not adherence to a creed, but "a dynamic believing in the person of Jesus" (Gerald Borchert, page 319, *John 12-21*).

Scripture tells us that on the Day of the Lord' return, every knee will bow before him and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11). Then there will be those who will be forced to confess what they never believed, as they stand condemned before the risen, reigning Lord. It will be too late to say, "*My Lord and my God.*" With regret they will admit, "*The Lord and the God.*" I pray you will not be one forced to admit to your everlasting regret that Jesus is Lord and God but not your Lord and God.

You may be joining me this morning with a new resolve to grow in a dynamic faith in Jesus Christ, who will be real to us as we walk with him in obedience and love. May we decide to keep growing in faith that is personal, based on the Word and made alive through our experience with the Holy Spirit, who is the Teacher who resolves all doubt!

We are either a doubting Thomas or we are a believing Thomas. We cannot keep our feet in two boats. Eventually two boats will shove off in different directions. You must decide.

Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. What do you think were the factors that contributed to Thomas' being a doubter? Do you have any similar characteristics and/or tendencies?
2. How is doubt different from unbelief? How can doubt harden into unbelief?
3. What is the evidence we have for our faith? In answering this question, read Romans 10:17.
4. What explanation can you give for those who have all the evidence for the risen Christ, yet refuse to believe? Is unbelief simply an intellectual problem, or is it also a moral problem and a matter of the will? Why so?
5. Is it possible for someone to believe in a creed without having a living faith in the person of Christ? Give an example from Scripture and from your experience or personal observation.

6. Read 1 Peter 1:8-9 and answer: Is the faith and joy of believers today any less than that of Thomas and the other disciples who saw the risen Lord? Why or why not?
7. Why do you think former doubters often become the strongest believers?
8. What answer would you give to someone who rejects the Gospel, saying he or she is “just a doubting Thomas”?

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