

# Was It Doubt or Courage?

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER  
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## John 20:19-31

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "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 (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

*A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

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There was a seventh-grade girl who told of an experience she had while walking home from a basketball game after school. It had turned dark already, and she had a mile-and-a-half walk home. Now girls normally walked home in packs, starting with four or five at the school, then leaving each one off at her house on the way home.

After about a half-mile, this girl was the only one left, in the dark. She was lugging a half-dozen textbooks and her viola. She wasn't accustomed to walking in the dark, and she thought to herself, *"The sooner I get home, the better."* She began to step up her pace, when suddenly she became aware that someone was behind her. She didn't think too much about it at first. But then she began to think about repeated warnings about girls accosted by men on their way home from school.

As she quickened her pace, she imagined her attacker was quickening his pace, too. And as her pace picked up, she began to get panicky, looking for an escape route. She wondered what this fiend behind her looked like.

As her pace picked up, his pace also picked up. She thought she could feel his hot breath on her neck. Too frightened to scream, she realized that her short legs were no match for his. Finally, she slowed down helplessly as her pursuer passed her by. It was a classmate no bigger than herself. *"Hi," he said.*

Isn't it amazing how our imaginations can work? How our fears can overtake us? There was no factual basis for the girl's fear. It was only what she thought was going to happen. We see the same kind of thing with Mary Magdalene. It is still dark when Mary goes to the tomb. She sees that the stone has been removed. So she goes and tells Simon Peter and the other disciple. Filled with fear she says, *"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."* Her imagination runs wild and she thinks his body is stolen. As she remains grieving at the tomb, Jesus comes to her and calls her name. It is then she recognizes him. Filled with excitement she runs to tell the disciples, *"I have seen the Lord."*

As for the disciples, they are locked behind closed doors, filled with their own fear. Peter and the other disciples have told them Jesus' body is no longer in the tomb. They believe their lives are in danger. And the only witnesses to his resurrection are women who, in those days, were considered to be unreliable witnesses. So they cower in doubt, dread, and dismay.

Suddenly, they are aware that a stranger is in their midst. How did he get in? What was he going to do to them? Then they hear the familiar voice of Jesus uttering the words, *"Peace be with you."* Jesus shows them his hands and side and they rejoice. Again Jesus says, *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."* It is John's unique version of Pentecost. Jesus breathes on them and says to them *"Receive the Holy Spirit."* Then suddenly, he is gone.

We might have thought that the disciples would have jumped up to run and told the world the good news that Jesus was alive. But instead they remain in that room behind closed doors. I suppose they figure it's still too dangerous for them to expose their connection to Jesus, especially with a story about his being alive. But then we come to find, that not all of the disciples are with them. One is missing. It's Thomas! He isn't there. I don't know about you, but I've always wondered, *"Why? Why wasn't Thomas hunkering down with the others? Why wasn't he frozen in place, terrified of what might happen to him like the others?"* John doesn't tell why and we don't know what he was doing. What we do know is that he has the courage go about living his life outside the locked room, while the other disciples are locked in fear.

Now we have seen Thomas' courage a couple of times before: When Jesus wants to go back to Judea, in their fear, the disciples try to dissuade him. But Thomas speaks up and says, *"Let us also go, that we may die with him."* When Jesus tells them he is preparing a place for them and they know the place where he is going, Thomas is like, *"No, we don't. How can we know the way?"* He has the courage to ask the questions the others are thinking. Jesus replies, *"Yes, you do. I am the way, the truth, and the life. So yes. I would say that Thomas is a courageous guy!"*

When the disciples find Thomas, they tell him that they have seen the Lord. Thomas' response is disbelief. He doesn't buy into their resurrection story. Thomas' conviction is that when you die, you're dead! That is his experience. So, he says to them, *"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

He wants to be sure the other disciples haven't lost their minds and made up a hopeful story. So is Thomas doubting? Or is he courageous?

A week later Thomas gets his assurance. The disciples are still hiding behind closed doors, but Jesus appears again to the disciples. This time Thomas is with them. Jesus says, *"Peace be with you."* Then Jesus approaches Thomas and addresses his needs. He doesn't wait for Thomas to ask. He invites Thomas to see his hands and to reach out and put his hands in his side. He says to Thomas, *"Don't be unbelieving. Believe."* The Greek word *apistos* means unbelieving. Thomas immediately answers him, *"My Lord and my God!"* His unbelief transforms to belief.

So where do we fit into this story? Can we believe and still have doubts? I think so. The fact that we are here this morning indicates that at some level we believe. At the same time, we wonder. We can be uncertain and question matters of faith. Perhaps the prayer of the father who brought his possessed son to Jesus is an honest and fitting prayer for all of us. The father said to Jesus, *"I believe, O Lord. Help my unbelief."*

But to have the faith of Jesus involves more than saying that Jesus is the Son of God. It requires that we believe what Jesus stands for, what he taught, and what he gave us by way of example. It moves us into action as active participants in the

way of Jesus. As Jesus declares in John 14:6, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*" His words underscore that he is the path to the Father and the embodiment of divine truth and life itself. To follow Jesus is to walk in his footsteps, embody his love and truth, and live out his mission in the world. This dynamic relationship with Jesus leads to a transformative, abundant life—one that reflects the very nature of God's love and truth, guiding believers into deeper communion with God and with one another.

So in conclusion, like the 7th grade girl who imagined she was being pursued, there are times when our imaginations can run wild. As a result, we think of the worst possible outcomes in our situation. In times like these, what gives us courage and brings us peace is our faith and the peace Christ has to offer. As disciples of Jesus, we are capable of greater faith and courage because we trust that Thomas and the others saw the resurrected Jesus. Thereby we are assured that the risen one is indeed the crucified one. We can be courageous like Thomas because Jesus comes to us in our doubt and fear. He brings us reassurance when we are uncertain about our future. So, continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

In Jesus' name, amen.