

Thomas's Sin – Thomas's Treasured Savior
John 20: [19-23] 44-30

Of all of Jesus' disciples, two are associated with descriptive terms that are negative with respect to the New Testament. Indeed the name "Thomas" can hardly be uttered without the addition of the adjective, "Doubting!" Is that fair?? After all, it was Peter who denied even knowing Jesus before an unnamed woman who recognized him as one of Jesus' followers. It was Peter who made the promise that he would never deny Jesus. Nevertheless it was Thomas who is stuck with the public memory that he was slow to accepting Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Now I am not going to deny the truth that Thomas initially resisted the liberating comfort that Jesus is no longer dead, but truly alive. Instead he wasted an entire week wallowing in his anguish while his fellow disciples seemed to him delusional in their joy.

But I also intend, with support from the Bible, to set the record straight by highlighting "the rest of the story," to echo Paul Harvey. Firstly notice that Thomas not only ultimately came to know that Jesus, who had been brutally crucified was now miraculously alive again; secondly, Thomas immediately framed that acknowledgment in the strongest declaration of belief in the entire New Testament: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28) – more about this statement later.

In addition, I intend to correct the way in which Thomas' movement from doubt to faith is so often misconstrued. As an illustration, atheist paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould, who authored the book, Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life, incorrectly appealed to the Apostle John's account of Thomas' conversion as proof that the Bible abhors the notion of factual evidence. Indeed Gould is completely wrong. Note for example, that according to the Bible's narration (its right there in Scripture) that that very first evening after the stone was rolled away Jesus showed his disciples that He was (as He now is) alive again. Jesus even emphasized the fact of His earlier death by showing them all (all who were present) the scars from His hands and feet and side. Thomas was, of course not present that night – but Jesus was. And, to the point, His other disciples were also present – present to both witness and witness to, the reality of Jesus' resurrection.

Thomas had his faults those days, but his sin was NOT a desire for assurance of Jesus' resurrection, but His refusal to receive and stand on the evidence that he did have in the form of both the testimony of his brothers and sisters and also the obvious joy which flowed from their experience of being with Jesus again.

To put the matter bluntly (which in this case is a helpful thing to do) Thomas' sin was insisting on his own immediate (or private) sign that Jesus was alive as opposed to trusting that the disciples were telling the truth. Just imagine the problem that would arise if everyone in church insisted on the same!

So where does this leave us (including today) who have no access, and cannot possibly have it, to what the disciples saw and experienced on Easter Sunday and the forty days which followed? The remainder of this message is to **begin** to lay out that this testimony is NOT weak (as is popularly imagined), but to the contrary, amazingly strong. You may be surprised to know that historians (not just Christians) are inclined to give historical testimony as a whole the benefit of the doubt UNLESS for clear reasons the writer show himself (herself) to be untrustworthy. Skillful scholars can discern the difference. Co-founder of Harvard Law School at our nation's founding, agnostic Simon Greenleaf, was so scornful of Christianity in his lectures at Harvard that his students urged him to discredit the four Gospels, which he indeed set out to do. Yet the outcome was not as planned. He indeed came not only to believe the Gospels, but to receive the crucified and risen Christ as His Savior and Lord. He came to write his book, *The Testimony of the Evangelists*, where he lays out just why the expert on testimony came to hold that the Gospels are true.

Part 1 of my sermon for the 2nd Sunday of Easter 2022 at Christ the Servant Lutheran Church in Lacey, Washington

Pastor Gary Jensen, retired