

24 Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

I remember when we first met him. Thomas or "Didymus" was his name. He looked like an honest hard working fellow. And he was very down to earth. He was not hugely into theology. He didn't ask questions like "why are we here" or "where did evil come from?" He just wanted to live life in a way that honored God. He was a doer and he didn't say a lot. He listened to Jesus mostly and Peter when he talked. But when he did say something, you knew it was significant. Not that his statements were deep. But they were just so practical and helped make the abstract more concrete.

One time we were across the Jordan quite some distance from Jerusalem. It was getting pretty hot there for Jesus. The religious authorities did not like His teaching or Him. Rumors abounded that they wanted to arrest and maybe even kill Jesus. So He led us away from the city. Word came that our good friend Lazarus was sick. We had often visited with Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha in Bethany.

We wondered if Jesus would immediately return to help Lazarus. It would be a great risk especially with those who sought Jesus. But Jesus did not sense any urgent need to help Lazarus. We remained there two days and continued with the ministry. We thought Jesus measured the danger of returning against the threat to Lazarus' life. He must have concluded that the danger was too great.

But then Jesus said, "Let's go back to Judea." That's where Lazarus lived. It didn't make any sense to go back now. If Lazarus was sick, he would be better by now. And some Jews wanted to stone Jesus in that region. We tried to talk him out of it. But Jesus then informed us that Lazarus had fallen asleep. So Jesus was going to wake him up. That was stranger still. Why did Jesus need to go and wake Lazarus up from sleeping at a risk to his own life?

But Jesus then made it clear. Lazarus was dead. And he was going to do something that would help us all believe. Then Jesus said again "Let us go to him." No one moved. What point would there be in going to Judea now? It was too late to save Lazarus. And Jesus was only putting his own life in danger and maybe ours too.

We all hesitated. Then Thomas spoke up. “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” Straight shooting Thomas had done it again. He voiced what we were all thinking. We might die if we go with Jesus back to Judea. But Thomas had not only thought about this. He was ready to do it because of his deep loyalty to Jesus. His statement helped us take the next step.

You probably have heard about what happened. Lazarus was dead for four days. Yet Jesus had them open up the tomb and called Lazarus out. The dead man came out in his grave clothes alive. With all that we had already seen with Jesus, this was perhaps the most startling. Surely He would now claim His kingdom. When word of this spread, He would have more than enough support to overthrow the Romans and take His place as the new king of Israel.

Soon, our hopes for Jesus’ royal coronation grew. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Crowds of people hailed him as their Savior and Deliverer. They cut off palm branches and waved them at him as he rode by. Jerusalem was stuffed full of people for the Passover Feast. News of his triumphal entry spread throughout the city. What was left to do but call on the people to rise up?

But Jesus didn’t do that. He spent the next few days talking with us and teaching us further. Then Thursday night came. He invited us for a supper before Passover. Some of us got into that old argument of who would be the greatest in the new kingdom. Jesus shamed our pride by washing our feet and instructing us to do the same for one another. Then he announced one of us would betray him. Judas got up and left. Jesus gave us a new command to love one another. Then Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him.

Things were spinning out of control. We didn’t know what to think; Judas gone. Peter stunned. We shamed. Jesus saw our troubled faces. So he addressed our troubled hearts. “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and will take you to myself. And you know the way to where I am going.”

What was Jesus talking about? His Father’s house has many rooms? Did that mean we were going to live in the temple? Why did he have to go to prepare a place for us? Where was he going to that he needed to come back from? If he was talking about the temple, we already knew how to get there. Is that what Jesus meant when he said “You know the way to where I am going?” But he had just told Peter that he could not follow Jesus to where he was going.

What did Jesus mean? No one dared to speak. We all had the same questions but for those who wanted to be greatest in the kingdom, we didn't want to look stupid.

But Thomas didn't care about that. He was that down to earth practical follower. So he asked that question all of us were thinking. "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" "Way to go Thomas," we thought. Better you than us. You can look like the simple minded one while we all retain our positions of respectability and hopefully get powerful positions in Jesus' ruling court."

Jesus didn't respond like we hoped. He didn't give us coordinates to punch into our map apps on our phones so we could follow him to where he was going. But what he said did bring some great comfort. "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." He spent the next while giving us more instructions and comfort for troubled times ahead.

You might know what happened after that. We left the upper room where we were having supper. We went to one of Jesus' favorite places to pray – the Garden of Gethsemane. There, Jesus was arrested and we all deserted him not only Peter. Then he was tried, crucified and died. Yet on that first day of the week that you now call Sunday, the tomb was empty. Later that night while we cowered in a locked room, Jesus came to us. He comforted us with those incredible words "Peace be with you." He showed us his hands and side. His presence filled us with such joy and hope.

But Thomas wasn't with us that evening. When we next saw him, we were so excited. "Thomas, we have seen the Lord. We saw him. He has risen!" But Thomas had that furled look on his face when he didn't understand something. He knew Jesus had died. It just didn't fit into his practical categories that Jesus could somehow be alive. We tried to convince him further. But the more we tried, the more entrenched he got. "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

We were too shocked to respond. Seriously Thomas! How could you be like that? How could you doubt? But hadn't we done the same thing just hours earlier? We didn't believe Mary Magdalene when she first told us that she saw the Lord. If Thomas had been with us that first night, he probably would have believed just like we did. If only the Lord could have visited us when Thomas was present.

Days went by. We kept on rejoicing. So much of what Jesus taught us began to make sense. He was not going to overthrow the Romans at that moment. But He had overthrown much greater enemies – like the devil and death! Yet Thomas still did not believe.

Until a week later when we were all together with the doors still locked. The authorities wanted to quell this “resurrection of Jesus” talk. They looked to shut us up. And suddenly he was there. Jesus stood among us again. He greeted us again with “Peace be with you.” Then he turned to Thomas. “O Lord, be gentle with him. He was just Thomas . . . practical Thomas.”

Then he said to Thomas “Put your finger here, and see my hands; put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” I had never seen Thomas look like that. His eyes looked bigger than golf balls. His chest was tensed up like it would never take a breath again. And then it all came out. You could just see him surrender and believe. He didn’t even need to touch Jesus and feel his side. He just confessed, “My Lord and my God.”

It was an incredible moment. And so delightful to see the most practical and down to earth one among us discover the truth that Jesus was alive. But Thomas not only saw Jesus alive. He committed his entire life to him at that moment. He declared that Jesus was his Lord. So Thomas would go wherever Jesus would send Him. He confessed that Jesus was God. Jesus’ appearance convinced Thomas that Jesus was actually God in flesh and now resurrected in a new body.

The book you now call the Bible doesn’t say any more about Thomas. But he actually went out all the way to India. He spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. There are some early church histories that talk about his ministry in the Indian sub-continent. He saw. He believed and He followed until His death.

You might say, “Well that’s great for Thomas. He actually got to see Jesus and talk with him while He was still on earth. He got to see Jesus ascend to heaven. That would sure help your belief right.” I can understand that. But Jesus has left all kinds of witnesses to his life, death and resurrection that we didn’t have at that time. You have the New Testament which is based on our eyewitness account and has been very reliably handed down over the centuries. You have the Holy Spirit in you which we did not receive in fullness until the Day of Pentecost. You have Jesus own words of assurance that he spoke to Thomas that day. “Have you believed Thomas, because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” There is a special blessing reserved for you who have not seen the

risen Lord yet have put your trust in Him and believe Jesus to be your Lord and your God. You might be very much like Thomas. You might have some honest doubts. Yet Jesus mercifully met Thomas and enabled His belief. If you truly seek the Lord, I do not doubt that He will respond and strengthen your faith in Him. For that is ultimately the reason John wrote his gospel – so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and believing you might have life in his name.”