

Series: Portraits of Jesus	Reference: <i>John 20</i>	Title: The Resurrected Redeemer	Date: 06.21.2020
Website Writeup: What does it mean to live in doubt of Jesus? How is our doubt assuaged, what is the answer to it? Is it a logical argument, or better yet, can it come from choosing to believe leading to an encounter with Christ?			

Bob Newhart 'STOP IT' VIDEO <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ow0lr63y4Mw>

We find ourselves in John 20 today. Let me recount the portraits of Jesus we've discovered throughout this series. He's the Word, Son of Man, Teacher of Teachers, Satisfier, Physician, Bread of Life, Fountain of Life, Savior, Light, Shepherd, Resurrection & Life, King, Servant, Encourager, Vine, Giver, High Priest, Truth & Crucified King. As we think about that list, it seems John's painting a multifaceted, complex portrait of Jesus as God with us.

Chapter 20 paints the portrait of Jesus as Resurrected Redeemer, as well as recounting His first post-resurrection encounters with the disciples. Last week we looked at His very painful crucifixion, and now we see after three days He's risen from grave. Over a period of days Jesus appears to the disciples, but one was not present, Thomas. We look at him today. Let's turn to John 20:24-29...

²⁴Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." (continuous tense - kept telling) 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."

²⁶Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came & stood among them & said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then 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." (in continuous tense - don't be disbelieving but believing)

²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord & my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen & yet have believed."

We don't know much about Thomas other than he was one of the 12 apostles. It seems Thomas is sort of the culmination, or pinnacle of John's Gospel. Some say John's gospel is written, not to believers, but to unbelievers. John writes in vv 30 & 31; *³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son*

of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John's purpose is to paint a portrait of Jesus as the Son of God for those of us who continually harbor doubt.

Thomas is interesting, his personality's complex, revealing a skepticism mixed with loyalty & faith. Here he's seemingly very doubtful wanting physical proof. Yet in chapter 11 when Jesus proposes they return to Judea to help when Lazarus had died, the other disciples say no. They were afraid the Jewish leaders would kill Jesus & maybe them. Yet, Thomas says in 11:16, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." Thomas was also the disciple who asked in John 14:5, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Thomas was the guy who wanted details. Chapter 20 gives us a picture of Jesus as the Resurrected Redeemer, but it also paints the portrait of Thomas, The Loyal Skeptic - the guy with unanswerable questions.

Thomas is very real, very human. We relate. If I can take some liberty to outline what Thomas may've been like, but very definitely what some of us are like, I might say this, Thomas seems to be the guy on the periphery. He's a part of the crowd, but you don't hear, or see too much about him. He's in community, but is sort of in & out. He comes late, leaves early. He'd be the guy who sleeps in, missing worship. He's not there with them, as they're gathered together 3 days later to witness Christ's resurrection, he's somewhere else. He misses out on the communal 'aha moment' with everyone when Jesus first presents Himself. His attention's drawn to other things. You can almost hear everyone saying, "Man I wish Thomas were here to see this!" I imagine if the disciples had a photo album of their little family of faith, Thomas would be in only 1 or 2 pictures. Flipping through that album years later stumbling across a picture of Thomas with their grandkids on their laps the kids might ask, "Who's that?" "Oh, that's Thomas, he was always in & out, we never really could get close to him. He was plagued by nagging doubt."

Thomas's are frustrating. They keep the community at arms length. Everything has to be proved, have a proof text, or be seen to be believed. They're always 'right', skeptical, questioning or downplaying another's experience asking, "Oh did it really happen like that?" Sort of like Scrooge, "Bah, humbug, I'll believe it when I see it!" Meanwhile everyone else is gathered, experiencing worship, Word & growing in community, seeing Jesus together. Meanwhile, Thomas's are off to the side doing something else, preoccupied with doubt, missing out.

As I thought about Thomas, it came to mind, he's like so many us reflecting our hearts so clearly. We all have a little doubt, wondering in the quiet moment, "Is this real?" We all get distracted by life, wandering in & out of community & worship. However, when we're there, we have these nagging moments where we say, "I don't believe it, I want proof." I was watching a film the other day about believers who go out & pray over others in the community. I found myself like Thomas asking, "Did that really happen? That's hard to believe. Was that guy really healed, or was he able to walk before that?" Thomas's are always saying well it could've been this, or it could've been that. "Did God really do that, or are you making it up?"

We Thomas's don't show up enough to see Jesus & as a result miss out. When we do show up the tapes of the skeptic play in our head crowding out any vision of Christ. We watch others in ecstatic worship & we think, "What a showboat, put your hands down. They're just emotional." Thomas's have experienced a lot of Jesus. Thomas saw firsthand Jesus feed thousands with a few loaves & fish, raise Lazarus from the dead, heal a blind man & a woman from bleeding. He heard Jesus say more than once "The Son of Man must suffer many things & be rejected by the elders & chief priests & scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Lk 9:22) Yet for Thomas, all this is forgotten in light of Jesus death. Thomas is the guy who can see miracles right before him, and still not look to the future with expectation of what Jesus can do in his life.

So many of us face issues in life & it seems, like Thomas, everything we've seen, heard & learned of Jesus goes right out the window in the face of trials. We react not out of faith, but desperation. Instead of saying, "This is gonna be hard, but I know Jesus is right here with me. Can't wait to see what He'll do!" We say, "What am I gonna do? Everything's falling apart!" We don't look forward in expectation of seeing Jesus appear, but we almost forget He was even there in the first place. Doubt blinds us to the work of Jesus right in front of us.

Like the disciples surrounding Thomas, others say to us, "Jesus is here, let's look to Him together." They urge us to turn to Jesus in our trials, to cling to Him in our desperation. But like Thomas, we say, "No, I won't believe it. I have to take care of this, He's not here." Thomas's are frustrating. They remain in community on the periphery. Some give up on them, some don't & we'd all like them to engage more deeply. If we're honest, we all have a little Thomas in us. The disciples allowed Thomas to stick around, he remained a part of their small community. But I imagine they were fairly frustrated at His unbelief since they HAD clearly seen Jesus. Ever been an eyewitness to something only to have people not believe you? It's frustrating to say the least.

There's an article called, *On Staying at the Table*. It concerns our disillusionment with community when we find it's actually difficult. It said, *Other people choose to stay in community – sort of – but withdraw their hopes & enthusiasms & energies, eventually creating the kind of community that Revelations calls 'lukewarm'. This is the condition of many of our churches... People have dealt with their disillusionment by 'sort of staying in community with each other, but not at any depth of investment or risk.* Thomas's can be like that. The same can be said of our relationship with Jesus because community & Jesus are intricately tied. When He's been in the grave 3 days, when He hasn't shown up as we expected Him to, we stick around church, but grow doubtful that He will, or even can show up & our motto becomes, 'I'll believe it when I see it'. But if that's our motto, we might close ourselves off from seeing Him work.

In the first chapter of *UnBound*, a book by Neal Lozano (my neighbor & friend), he tells the story of a young girl, Anna, who had grown up in an alcoholic home & had come to him for prayer. She wanted to be free from the demons which plagued her. She wanted to forgive those who hurt her. However, when it came to praying to Jesus she couldn't voice the words - life had beat her up to the point that she'd become a Thomas. Neal

sensed something & the Holy Spirit led him in prayer for the girl. He prayed, “Lord, Anna has lived in chaos & has never known what to expect. She wanted to fix things, but couldn’t.” Anna began to sob, Neal continued, “But the thing she doesn’t understand is why You didn’t do anything. She knows You are God & can do anything. She’s cried out to You, begged You & cried herself to sleep night after night, and You didn’t answer.” Now Anna sobbed uncontrollably along with others in the room, Neal finished, “Lord, I don’t understand why You didn’t do something.” And they all wept together. It was at that point that Jesus showed up for this girl, just at the right time. Who knows why, but maybe it was like a ripening fruit - she was finally ready to forgive.

Where others eventually grow silent towards the Thomas’s in the room, Jesus doesn’t. He shows up for them at just the right time. As we gather around the table, everyone lovingly urging the Thomas that Jesus is alive & well, and here for them, Jesus shows up. He could show up & rebuke Thomas in a condescending tone. But doesn’t, because He’s not threatened by Thomas’s doubt as we are. He’ll stoop low & guide Thomas’s fingers into His wounds, the same wounds which bring Thomas healing. He’ll reveal the painful scars of His own crucifixion to the half-loyal skeptic. He’s not mad at, or looking down on the skeptic, He wants to reveal Himself to them.

Questions are good. Thomas had them, and Jesus was not threatened. He invites sincere questioning from those who want to know Him. We invite them as well. Even the most learned have them, deep, simple, or frightening questions. None are threatening. Thomas found his answers in relationship with Jesus & the faith community.

In this painting by Caravaggio, we see Jesus taking the hand of Thomas & leading the questioning process. Thomas’s may think they’re smart, in charge & being only logical, or rational with their criticism. Thomas seems to be the one demanding answers, or the one in charge, yet he discovers Jesus is in charge leading him into a deeper faith & understanding. Jesus doesn’t answer all his questions, but leads Thomas to Himself.

Six:Eight exists for everyone. You don’t have to believe to come here. You can be disillusioned, hurt & even angry with the church. You can be curious about spiritual matters, and come & ask sincere questions. All of us are at different points on the spiritual journey. Some of us are like Thomas, we’re skeptics. We’ve seen Jesus work, we’ve heard his words & on a good day may say, “Man I’d die for you!” But on others we may say, “It’s really hard to believe today, I can’t seem to wring an ounce of faith out of my heart.” And this community should always sit around the table & urge you closer to seeing Jesus appear. Community can answer some questions, but for a Thomas that’s never enough, Jesus must break through.

If you’re a Thomas, maybe you feel like everyone around you is trying to answer your questions for you & they fall short. Or they’re simply saying, “Now, concerning your doubt & lack of faith, I’m going to say to you just two words. No need to write them down, it’s just two words. Most people can remember them. STOP IT! Just stop it, gosh you are such a big baby!”

Maybe that IS what they're saying. Maybe they don't know how to deal with your doubt & lack of faith & don't have answers for you. Maybe they doubt themselves, can't admit it, you're exposing it & in a panic they just say, 'Stop it!' Don't get mad at your brothers & sisters for not knowing what to say, or how to say it, most of us aren't skilled counselors, we're just people trying to muddle through. They're just trying, as best they know how, to move you forward. But we can all agree that 'Stop it' isn't the best counseling technique, it's simplistic & hurtful. It doesn't account for the complexity of a Thomasonian heart. We need good counsel from our community even if it's not done well sometimes. Community may not be able to give you satisfactory answers. What we need is Jesus.

Like Thomas, or Anna, when He does appear, allowing us to feel His wounds, we'll also say, "My Lord & My God!" All skepticism & disbelief will melt away as we stand before the Resurrected Redeemer. Logic & questions won't matter. You see, Thomas had been around the track with Jesus. Many of us have been around church for years. Thomas had not only heard the stories, he'd lived & seen them happen. You've heard the stories. I bet you've seen the Lord do wonderful things. Yet, Thomas, like many of us, remained in a state of disbelief. In the original wording Jesus spoke in the continuous tense saying, "Thomas, you're always disbelieving. Start believing." As if to say, even when you see, you're always questioning, stop it! Be in a constant state of turning to me, constantly believing, renewing belief more & more as you go! You see, Jesus has the right to say 'Stop it' to Thomas, because Jesus bears the wounds of the cross.

John went through a lot of pains tracing the unbelief of others which culminated in the painful crucifixion of Christ. His gospel comes to a crescendo in the Skeptic closest to the Resurrected Jesus. John ends this section by recounting Jesus' response to Thomas, *"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen & yet have believed."*

In the 2nd book of the Chronicles of Narnia, Lucy's the only one who can see Aslan half way through the story. The others scoff & don't believe her, but Peter says something interesting, "The last time I doubted Lucy I looked pretty foolish." Throughout the movie Aslan presents himself to Lucy since she's ready, but it doesn't mean he's not right there with the others as well. At times we just need to listen to our brothers & sisters, be encouraged by their words & wait to see Jesus show up for ourselves. You may not be able to put your fingers in His side, or feel the holes in His wrists, but you've seen Him work & we only need to face the future with expectation of Jesus showing up everyday. And when He doesn't show up as we'd like, or expect...it doesn't mean He's not there - we're called to faith & obedience through all the rich & hungry times as well.

Community Group Questions

1. Icebreaker: what's your favorite game?
2. Pray and invite God to help you take an honest look at your faith life tonight alongside your group.
3. Today's sermon is one of our last in our John series, "Portraits of Jesus." Read John 20:24-31 together.
4. Together as a group, summarize what we know of Thomas. Use what we've seen in the Bible and all that Jason outlined in the sermon today. How do you see Thomas in Christianity today? How do you see him in yourself?
5. One way Pastor Jason's sermon described Thomas was this,
 “So many of us face issues in life & it seems, like Thomas, everything we've seen, heard & learned of Jesus goes right out the window in the face of trials. We react not out of faith, but desperation. Instead of saying, “This is gonna be hard, but I know Jesus is right here with me. Can't wait to see what He'll do!” We say, “What am I gonna do? Everything's falling apart!” We don't look forward in expectation of seeing Jesus appear, but we almost forget He was even there in the first place. Doubt blinds us to the work of Jesus right in front of us.”
6. Think of a recent trial or hardship you've faced in your own life, or maybe you're currently facing one-do you see flavors of Thomas in you? Or perhaps you feel a bit different than Thomas and have the spiritual gift of faith, where believing is more natural or 'easy' than Thomas' predisposition to doubt. If you feel you have the gift of faith, consider how you practice it. Do you encourage those like Thomas to remember what they've tasted and seen and believe? Or do you say, “just stop it!”?
7. Pray for each other. Pray for faith and encouragement for those who can relate to Thomas, pray for grace and understanding for those who are may able to use their gift of faith in our church community.