



Southwestern Minnesota Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

## Sermon for April 27, 2025 | John 20:19-31

By Pr. Seyward Ask

Our Gospel reading comes from St John, the 20th chapter, beginning with the 19<sup>th</sup> verse:

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” <sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>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.”

<sup>26</sup>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.” <sup>27</sup>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.” <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup>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.” <sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

This is the Gospel of our Lord.

I want you to forget everything you think you know about this story. What do we know about it that I want you to forget? Let’s see...well, Thomas’ primary feature is doubt; Thomas is not

as faithful as the others, making him a remedial disciple of sorts; and, oh yeah, Jesus rebukes him for his lack of faith. Well guess what: wrong, wrong and wrong! None of these things are true. Let's take a closer look.

First myth: Thomas' primary feature is doubt. Throughout the entire Gospel of John, and in fact all four of the Gospels, Thomas is never once referred to as the doubter or Doubting Thomas, as we love to call him. In fact, he's only ever given one title, and that is the Twin, and aside from his name meaning "twin," the bible doesn't lend us any explanation as to why he's called the Twin. But one thing is certain: he is never called the doubter, and doubt is not his main attribute. In fact, earlier in the Gospel of John, when Jesus announces plans of returning to Judea, while the other disciples discourage the idea because they are certain it will mean death for Jesus, it is Thomas who talks them into following Jesus so that they may die with him. Thomas isn't a doubter; he's a realist. Only days earlier, he had watched his good friend die the terrible and humiliating death of a criminal. Of course he'd be skeptical when his friends were suddenly claiming Jesus to be alive and well.

Okay, next myth: Thomas is a slightly inferior disciple. Thomas asked for nothing more than what everyone else got -- to see and touch the Lord for himself. After Mary Magdalene announced to the other disciples that she had seen the risen Lord, they were now to be found hiding behind locked doors, and they only rejoiced after they were able to see and touch Jesus for themselves. Thomas is not at all less faithful than the other disciples. If anything, he is a model disciple, or at least a model of how one becomes a disciple.

Because when he does get to see and touch the risen Lord, his faith becomes as real as his skepticism, and he alone gives Jesus the highest praise in the entire New Testament, calling Jesus, “my God.”

Third myth: Jesus rebukes Thomas for his lack of faith. Jesus isn't scolding Thomas; in fact, his words aren't even for Thomas at all. Rather, they're meant for the original readers of John's Gospel, some of the earliest Christian communities, those who didn't get to physically see and touch Jesus, and yet have come to believe through Christ's continued revealing presence in the world. And this includes us, Christian communities today. Jesus is not rebuking Thomas for his doubt; he is blessing us for our faith. Unlike our world and culture that thrives on facts and what can be proven, the bible's definition of faith is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Jesus is lifting up our faith, not chiding Thomas for his doubt. And while I'm on that topic of doubt, let me crush one more myth and make it clear that doubt is not the opposite of faith and not at all a bad thing. On the contrary, the two go together, because doubt is an healthy ingredient of faith. It is simply not true that the more faith you have, the fewer questions or concerns or doubts you'll have. We aren't about blind faith and belief here, and we aren't about shunning people's questions and doubts, although I'm sure it can feel like that at times, and it certainly is the message that comes across in other churches and denominations.

In all the joy and celebration of Easter last Sunday, with the end of Lent and the return of our Alleluias, it can be easy to forget that the very first Easter wasn't at all like that. There

was no fanfare of brass, no lillies adorning the temple, no jelly beans or Easter egg hunts or big family get togethers. And there was certainly no, “Christ has risen, Christ has risen indeed, Alleluia.” Because on that first day, the disciples weren’t sure that Christ has risen indeed. Before any initial joy or celebration, there was fear and doubt and confusion and pain. The disciples had just watched their friend die before their own eyes, and they didn’t yet understand what happened, what took place that day. Even a week after Jesus appeared to them, they were still behind locked doors, making me think that perhaps Thomas wasn’t the only one still needing some reassurance that Jesus had risen indeed, had conquered death, had returned.

But Jesus kept showing up. He showed up for Mary, and he showed up for the disciples, and he showed up for Thomas, and he continues to show up for his gathered disciples, for you and me, revealing his presence in the Word and in the water, and in the bread and wine. The boisterous celebration of the Easter season can feel like it leaves little room for our doubts and confusion and pain. But there is room for it, here, in this community of faith. Because like Mary and Thomas and the other disciples, until we can understand, until we experience Christ revealed to us, we aren’t going to believe. But we can help each other; we can support each other in our doubts, and lift each other up in our joy. Let’s face it: we need each other. We need this community of believers so that when I have a day when I am filled with questions and doubt, I will be surrounded and lifted up by this faithful community, and I will see the presence of Christ enacted through you, through your service and witness.

The amazing thing about Jesus is that even when we hide ourselves behind our doubt and questions and confusion, Jesus shows up anyway. There is nothing that could separate us from the love of God in Christ; no locked doors, no walls, no boundaries of any kind, be they physical or emotional. No matter where we may be in our faith journey, Jesus is right there with us, continuing to show up again and again to reveal his presence to the world.

And that's where we get to something very important Jesus said to his disciples. He said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." With the help of the Holy Spirit, we are called to go beyond these locked doors and out into the world, so that we may help others to see the presence of the living Christ revealed to them. Because the presence of Christ is revealed to the world through your actions and your witness. I know it's easier to stay in this safe place, behind these locked doors, so to speak, and worship God right here and then go about our everyday lives for the rest of the week. But that isn't enough. Jesus is sending us out so that the whole world may have Christ revealed to them. We all know that faith isn't always easy, and we know that having a community of support makes all the difference. So as Jesus has asked us to do, let us leave the safety of the sanctuary and be that community of support to the world, that all may see the presence of the living Christ revealed to them. Amen.