**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 4-7-2024
Thomas – Doubter to Dedicated Disciple**

Friends, one thing that I am very thankful for is that our God is a God of transformation. Yes, it is 100% true that our God loves us just as we are. But so often, this phrase is applied to say that God affirms everything about our lives. That would be a poor application of this true statement.

He loves us just as we are because all people are of extreme worth to Him. He made us and He doesn’t make junk. We are precious and extremely valuable to Him. This is how we should understand the fact that God loves us just as we are.

To put it another way, God loves us just as we are, but He loves us enough to desire transformation for us. He always wants what is best for us, which is to be transformed to be more and more like Jesus.

When we read the Bible, we read of person after person encountering God’s transforming grace. And if that person choses to walk faithfully with the Lord, we read of them becoming more and more transformed to be godly living. While they may slip up, if they do they turn back to God and keep going forward. I think of King David as a good example of this.

And the God of the Bible is the same God that rules and reigns today. He is the same God of transforming grace. And so, as we begin this season of the year on the other side of Jesus’ resurrection, this season often referred to as Eastertide, I invite you to take a journey with me exploring some of the people in the New Testament that were powerfully transformed by Jesus Christ. I firmly believe that the Holy Spirit will use each one of these stories of transformation to not only enhance our love and knowledge of God’s Word, but also bring about transformation in our own lives as well.

And I think that there is no more fitting person to begin this journey with than a man named Thomas. It was today, a week after Jesus’ resurrection, that we see Thomas encountering the risen Jesus for the first time.

Now of all of Jesus’ twelve apostles, I think that Thomas is often given the biggest bum rap, so to speak. How do we often refer to Thomas? Doubting Thomas, right?

We remember him from one very poor decision where he chose doubt over faith. And that is where we are going to start today. Please turn with me to John 20:19-31:

**19On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.**

**21Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”**

**24Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”**

**But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”**

**26A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”**

**28Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”**

**29Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

**30Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

So, what all is happening here? In verses 19-23 we read of Jesus coming to the group of apostles on the evening of His resurrection. Jesus comes to them and says, “Peace be with you.” At this time the group had locked themselves in this house because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders.

I’m sure that this group was amazed. John writes that they were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Overjoyed. What a powerful emotion. Perhaps you can think of moments in your life when you have been overjoyed. Maybe at a wedding or a graduation or a birthday or other celebration, like your team winning the championship. Sometimes we can be experiencing so much joy in the moment that we find ourselves speechless. It can sometimes be difficult to put into words all that we are processing when we experience being overjoyed.

This was what this group was collectively experiencing. And Jesus comes to them and provides proof that He was indeed alive. He shows them His hands and His side. There must have still been wound marks in these places, as it was unmistakable that this was indeed their Rabbi, their Lord, their Messiah and Savior. Jesus was risen indeed.

Jesus then breathes on them and imparts the Holy Spirit to each person present. What an amazing moment!

But this group of apostles was only 10. Judas had already taken his own life. And Thomas was not there. We are not told where Thomas was on the evening of the resurrection of Jesus. Was he out taking a long walk, just processing the events of the previous days? Did he leave Jerusalem to see his family. We are told from this passage as well that Thomas was called Didymus. The name Thomas is actually the same name as Didymus. Thomas is Aramaic and Didymus is Greek. But both Thomas and Didymus mean twin. So, it definitely appears that Thomas had a twin. Did he go to see his brother or sister? His parents? We do not know.

We are told that the other apostles tell Thomas that they had seen the Lord. No doubt the ten had told Thomas of the signs that this was indeed Jesus. But Thomas, in this moment, chooses doubt over faith.

And he states, **“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”**

Then, we are told that a week later, the group is gathered at this same house. Perhaps it was where they had celebrated the Passover meal together. But this time, Thomas was there with them. Like the previous week, the doors were locked. No doubt the disciples continued to be afraid of the Jewish authorities.

But again, Jesus comes to them. Again, Jesus says, “Peace be with you.” But then, Jesus addresses Thomas. He tells him, **“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”**

And Thomas makes this beautiful confession, “My Lord and my God!”

**29Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

Friends, Thomas’ story is much bigger than this one moment, just as each of our stories are far bigger than one moment. Thomas had faithfully followed Jesus for years. Thomas would be there for other post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Thomas was there on the day of Pentecost and was filled with the Holy Spirit along with the others. And Thomas, like the rest of the apostles, was arrested and beat by the Jewish religious leaders in Acts chapter 5.

And Thomas would go on to proclaim Jesus as Messiah and Savior and Lord until Thomas was most likely killed for faithfully proclaiming Jesus. There are churches in India and other areas that trace their beginnings to Thomas traveling there and sharing Jesus.

But friends, Thomas is an excellent example of transformation. Yes, he did choose doubt instead of trust. Yes, he should have heeded the many testimonies of the ten disciples and likely other witnesses of the resurrection that he would have probably encountered, such as the women.

But Thomas did not let those moments of failure define him. He did what I suppose Taylor Swift would have suggested for him. He chose to shake it off. He chose to keep moving forward in faith and obedience. He didn’t stay stuck in that place of failure. He did not let it define him, even though much of history has tried to define him by his failure.

Finally, we turn back to the concluding two verses from today’s Scripture. Again, John writes these words, **30Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

These verses are so important. They actually include the purpose of John’s Gospel. John’s Gospel is meant to be a collection of signs and evidence to everyone that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. And because Jesus is these things, He is worthy of one’s belief and allegiance. John is saying that there is more than enough evidence for the readers to put their faith in Jesus.

It is important to remember that biblical faith is not baseless. It is not wishful thinking. Rather, biblical faith is about choosing to trust based on the evidence. I love how one of my professors in seminary once stated, “I believe in Christianity because it is true.” I’ve also heard it said that Christianity is a thinking person’s religion. This is because Christianity is based on historical events --- the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension of Jesus Christ. Christianity is based on the miraculous events of Pentecost and the power of the good news to transform hearts and minds and towns and cities. And the same God we serve has been at work in history through the exodus and the flood and the covenants with Abraham and David and so many other things that are soundly historical fact. It is not a pipe dream, but historical reality.

It is true that, like Thomas, we were not present on the night of the resurrection. But we have many testimonies from Scripture from those that were present and who did see Him rise from the dead. Biblical faith is choosing to trust in the evidence and to live in faithful loyalty to the Triune God revealed in time and place and history and confirmed in the written Scriptures. The evidence is overwhelming!

And also, like Thomas, all of us are called to live as dedicated disciples. How do we do this well? This leads to our main takeaway from Thomas’ transformation?

And I believe it is this. We are not to let our doubts or struggles of the past or present define us, but instead, we are to let our faith, our belief, our obedience define us.

Thomas moved on from his failure in John chapter 20. And he pressed forward in faithful obedience. Is there anything from the past that we need to let go of today? Any failure? Any time we chose doubt despite the evidence?

We do not need to remain in that place. We can choose to be like Thomas and not remain in that place.

We can confess Jesus as our Lord and our God. We can repent of our sins – unmerited doubt or otherwise. And we can shake it off and embrace the grace and mercy of Christ.

Christ used Thomas mightily. Jesus did not give up on him when he failed. And please know that Jesus will not give up on you either.

Now how do we grow in our faith? How are our beliefs in the Lord Jesus strengthened? We are told in God’s Word that faith comes from hearing and hearing the Word of God.

If we want to grow in our faith, it is not by willing ourselves to grow more, but by sitting under the truth of God’s Word. By reading of the countless testimonies of God’s actions towards humanity and reflecting on the testimonies of people who saw God do this or that --- this will build our faith.

Truly, what we are feeding grows. If we are feeding our souls with the word of truth, our faith, our belief will undoubtedly grow.

Friends, we have so many Bibles in America. We have so many Bibles in Chestnut Grove Church that it can be difficult to find a home for every one of them. But if we get into God’s Word to the extent that God’s Word gets into us, our faith will greatly increase. And again, the Christian faith is not a baseless faith. It is not a wishful thinking faith. It is based on reality and truth and history.

Finally, like Thomas, let us go forward in what God has called us to. All of us can be powerfully used as representatives of Jesus Christ in the world today. The world needs faithful representatives. We, together, will make an amazing difference for Jesus in this world.

May we all be like Thomas, proclaim Jesus as our Lord and our God. May we believe even though we have not seen Him with our own eyes. The evidence is more than convincing for anyone with an open mind to consider. And truly, there is no higher privilege in life than being a faithful follower and dedicated disciple of Jesus the Christ.

Let’s pray…

Resources:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+20%3A19-31&version=NIV>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_the_Apostle>

<https://athrillofhope.blog/2022/06/20/since-god-loves-you-as-you-are-he-wont-leave-you-as-you-are/>