

## ARE YOU A TWIN OF THOMAS?

Our text for today is the Gospel Lesson for the Sunday after Easter. From John chapter 20, we listen again to verses 24 & 25:

*<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples 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 nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Over the years, the Grace congregation has been blessed with its share of twins. Long time members probably think of Bill and Bob Rauh who grew up at Grace. The Hoffman twins, Melissa and Jennifer, came along a few years ago. And then there were two sets of Kosanke twins, Pete and Jennifer, followed by their cousins Cora and Missy. Some of our members have a twin brother or sister in another town or state, and we aren't aware of it. Last Sunday Joe Dyjak's twin brother John was here for our Easter celebration and surprised those of us who didn't know Joe was a twin.

It should not surprise you to hear that there are twins in the Bible. The most famous, of course, are Jacob and Esau. But there's also Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh along with Perez and Zerah, the sons of Judah and Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar. Our lesson today is about another twin from the Bible, Thomas. How do we know Thomas was a twin? Well, his name 'Thomas' means "twin" in the Aramaic language and we're told in verse 24 of our text that he was also known as 'Didymus.' Didymus is the Greek word for "twin." So it's pretty clear, Thomas was a twin to someone.

Was the twin of Thomas alive at this time? Was the twin a man or a woman? Was Thomas' twin a believer in Christ? We just don't know, the Bible doesn't tell us. Maybe you're the missing twin.

Are You A Twin To Thomas?

We hope you're not his twin when it comes to DOUBT.

We hope you are his twin when it comes to BOLD CONFESSION.

The Gospel for the Sunday after Easter recounts an event that occurred one week after the original Easter Sunday. Over the centuries this is the Sunday that ol' Thomas, Doubting Thomas, gets raked over the coals in the sermon. How could he doubt the resurrection of Jesus? How could he demand proof before he would believe? Then we go out of our way to emphasize verse 29 in which Jesus says, "... *blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" That's us! We believe in Jesus even though we haven't seen him. Blessed are we! What good Christians we are. What a strong faith we have! The truth is we believers are often plagued by questions and skepticism. Too often we are a twin of Thomas when it comes to doubt.

The Gospels tell us little about Thomas. He claimed to be a loyal follower of Christ. He insisted, along with the other disciples, that he would never leave Jesus. But when push came to shove, when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, Thomas fled like a scared rabbit along with all the rest. Was Thomas even in Jerusalem on Easter Sunday? For some reason he was not with the other ten disciples on Easter Eve, huddled together behind locked doors. Suddenly Jesus appeared in their midst. He said, "Peace be with

you.” They were afraid. They thought Jesus was a ghost. Then Jesus showed them his battle scars, the nail marks on his hands, the gash where the spear had pierced his side. There was no denying it, Jesus was alive. He had risen from death to life.

Why wasn’t Thomas there in the locked room? Was he afraid to associate with the other ten disciples? Was he discouraged? “There’s no hope now. Jesus is dead. What’s the use?” Whatever the reason, when the disciples told Thomas, “We have seen the Lord,” Thomas couldn’t believe it. The empty tomb, the women witnesses, the message of the angels, the Emmaus travelers, the appearance to the ten, Thomas couldn’t believe it. “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, unless I put my finger where the nails were, unless I put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

Unless I see it with my own eyes, unless I touch it with my own hands . . . does this sound familiar? Have your own thoughts or prayers ever taken this line of thought? “Lord, I’m desperate! Unless you send help, I’m going to think you don’t care.” “Lord, unless you heal my spouse, Lord, unless you cure my disease, Lord, unless you do something about the future - it’s uncertain and threatening and bleak, I’m going to think you don’t hear me.” Lord, unless you send me next month’s rent payment and car payment, Lord, unless you let me win the Powerball Lottery, I’m not going to trust in you.” “Lord, unless you come across, unless you come through, unless you give me what I think I need, unless you put me on Easy Street (where I belong), I’m not going to believe in you as a loving Father.

Are you tempted to be a twin to Thomas in this regard, are you tempted to be an “unless” Christian? Are you tempted to demand visible, tangible proof (on your terms) of God’s love and care? Are you tempted to try to bargain your faith with God? Well, you can’t make deals with God. You aren’t in any position to negotiate with God. In our natural, human state, you stand before God a lost and condemned sinner, blind to God’s will, dead in transgressions and sins, hostile to God and his Word.. It is those nail prints in the hands of Jesus - It is those nail prints in the feet of Jesus - It is that pierced side, the same one Thomas demanded to see and touch - these enable you to stand before God righteous and redeemed through faith in Jesus. Jesus suffered these wounds for you. Jesus died the horrible death they evidence for you. By his sinless life, by his undeserved execution your debt is paid. Faith and trust in Jesus allow you to stand before God redeemed, restored, forgiven. Faith . . . Belief . . . Not Doubt.

I know doubt plagues many believers. I know doubt comes easily to the human mind. Where are you tempted to doubt? Do you doubt God’s loving care for you? Are you worried about running out of money or falling prey to some illness or disease? Or does your doubt have to do with the things of God’s Word? Do you truly believe all the teachings in Scripture or do some make you doubt, like the six day creation, Jonah and the big fish, angels, miracles? Do you sometimes doubt whether faith in Jesus is the only way to heaven? After all, there are so many who don’t believe in Jesus, and some of them are really good people. There must be another way. Do you doubt the difficult teachings, the ones that run counter to your wisdom, God’s role for man & woman, member communion, the power of Baptism? Do you doubt the wisdom of God’s commandments, like the 6<sup>th</sup> which says sexual activity belongs only within the bonds of marriage? Do you doubt whether God has your best interest in mind as you go through hardship or affliction or the loss of a loved one or financial difficulty? Or is your problem doubt with a capital D? Do you sometimes wonder whether any of this is true, God, heaven, hell, life after death? Do you sometimes wonder whether or not this life is all there is, that when you die, that’s it, you cease to exist? I call that doubt with a capital D.

Doubt plagues many believers. Doubt comes easily to the human mind. If you are waiting for external evidence to remove your doubt, for instance, an angel appearing at your bedside tomorrow morning

informing you that God really exists and that he cares for you, you are replacing faith with tangible proof and your own personal experience. That's not faith! Faith doesn't believe because of tangible proof or because of personal experience, faith believes in spite of tangible proof and in spite of personal experience. Faith believes because God says so.

Let Jesus address your doubts the way he confronted Doubting Thomas. One week after Easter the disciples were assembled again and this time Thomas was with them. Jesus appeared just as before and again said, "Peace be with you." Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Touch my hands, Thomas." "Touch my side, Thomas." "Stop doubting and believe." When Jesus confronted Doubting Thomas, all doubt disappeared. That same Jesus, who was patient and compassionate with Doubting Thomas, is just as willing today to answer anyone who comes to him with doubt or fear. Let Jesus address your doubts and confront your fears. He won't come to you as he came to Thomas, but he does come to you in his Word. In his Word he answers your questions, he soothes your fears, he calms your anxieties, he confronts your doubts and says to you, "Stop doubting and believe." He has given you the Gospel in Word and Sacrament to strengthen your faith. And as your faith grows, the doubts begin to disappear.

In the final verses of our text, the Apostle John writes:

*<sup>30</sup> Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe (Not Doubt, but Believe) believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31 NIV).*

God's Word is here for you to read and study. His Word is here to strengthen your faith and to dispel doubt. God does not want you to doubt, he wants you to know and be certain, especially when it comes to life after death for believers in Jesus. In his first epistle, the Apostle John says:

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know (be absolutely certain) know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13 NIV).*

God does not want you to doubt. And there is no need to be a twin of Thomas when it comes to doubt, but you can be a twin of Thomas when it comes to making a bold confession. When Jesus confronted Thomas, Thomas replied, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus did not say, "Oh Thomas, don't call me God." Instead he replied, "Because you have seen me, you have believed . . ." Believed what? That Jesus is Lord and God. " . . . blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" - that Jesus is Lord and God. With so many religions and so many "scholars" and so many books and movies and television programs denying the deity of Christ, there will soon be opportunities for you to defend your faith and make the same bold profession that Jesus Christ IS God and Lord. You'll be a twin of Thomas if you do.

Thomas was a Doubter for a week but a bold confessor for the rest of his life. Tradition says that Thomas carried his bold confession, that Jesus is God and Lord, as far east as India where he died a martyr's death. Thomas now lives in the embrace of those nail marked hands and that pierced side. You can be confident that you too, as a believer in Jesus, will someday see those same scars which were incurred for you. Like your twin Thomas you will be able to say, "My Lord and My God" and remain in his presence forever. Amen.