

My Lord and My Savior!

John 20:19-31

Father, Open our hearts to your Word, and through the written word and the spoken word, may we know your Living Word Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Have you ever questioned your faith? I mean more so than in the times of life we just don't understand what's going on around us.

To seriously have that feeling of uncertainty and total lack of conviction?

I have. For me, I was sitting in Littlejohn Coliseum. It was graduation day at Clemson, and I was receiving a Master of Science Degree. And as I sat there waiting for what seemed an eternity for my name to be called, all I could think about was how abandoned by God I felt. I had no direction or purpose. What should have been a glorious day, was emotionally twisted with doubts about God. Yes, I may have looked good on the outside, but inside I was morally and emotionally wrecked. I had lost my way as a graduate student. I was adrift in my faith. I just wanted God to show himself to me again. I wanted to have that type of exclamation found in verse 28, when Thomas cries out, "My Lord and my God!"

You see, I identify with Thomas. Even if he is considered by many theologians to be complex. Many see him as being a somewhat negative person; a complainer who tends to be anxious. Thomas is even compared to Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh by Thomas MacArthur in his Christian book, *Twelve Ordinary Men*. And yet others have the impression that Thomas is perhaps the boldest and bravest of the Apostles. In Sean McDowell's book, *The Fate of the Apostles*, he alludes to Thomas as being courageous, having an inquisitive nature and a demand for evidence. This is the Thomas that I see. So let's turn to Scripture to see what the Bible actually says about this.

One of the first looks into Thomas' character comes when Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to Bethany. John tells us in Chapter 11, Jesus, when ready to raise Lazarus from the dead, says to his disciples, "Now, let's go to Bethany." The disciples are unsettled. They say to Jesus, "The last time you were there, the Jews tried to stone You." It's at this point that Thomas interjects the first words that we have from him in John's Gospel. Thomas says, "Let us go with Jesus that we may die with Him."

Going back to Bethany may well end up with the Jews trying to stone them all; and this is one place MacArthur claims Thomas is like Eeyore, "We're never gonna make it. Let's just go along and all die together." But I lean the other direction. For Thomas to have the courage to stand for Jesus and the willingness to go, even if it means his life... that kind of love and commitment grabs my attention. And this courage correlates with what we see in Thomas as we continue to read into John, Chapter 14.

This time, in the upper room during the Passover, Jesus says to the disciples, "I'm going to prepare a place for you." And He adds, "You all know the way to where I am going." It's here that Thomas makes his second contribution in the gospels. He says, "Lord, we do not know

where you're going. How can we know the way?" Whatever else you may think about Thomas, here's a man who loves Jesus. Here's a man who wants to be in the presence of Jesus, and the thought that most concerns Thomas in John 14, is that there may come a time when he won't be able to find Jesus anymore. And it's Thomas' question of, "How can we know the way?" that leads to that famous statement of Jesus, responding to Thomas for the benefit of all humanity in all the ages; Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Reverend Derek Thomas puts it this way, "the one clear and indisputable thing about Thomas is his love for Jesus. And the thought of losing Him caused him great pain." This is where I was that graduation day of May 8th 1992. I had the thought of not being in His presence and being painfully lost. Without Jesus as my anchor, I was like a boat adrift. Was I even committed? How was I to find my way back? For me, I reached back to Billy Graham's teaching. Three ways to finding and increasing Faith.

1. Pray for faith, for more faith, and pray often;
2. Read God's Word into your Mind to know His Voice; and

thirdly, Listen to Obey God's word, following His voice to let everything you say and do glorify him.

Simply put; to Pray, to Read, and to Obey; sometimes the simple recipes bring the most comfort and healing.

So I began to read my Bible again and pray, and it is in this account of Thomas, that the Holy Spirit, led me out of my darkness.

Today, in celebration of our Second Sunday of Easter, in light of this background on Thomas, I want to explore more on our reading and on our dynamic Faith that gives us hope and leads us to the fullness of truth where we come to exclaim, "My Lord and My God!"

In our Gospel reading we begin with verse 19, so please join me again in your pew bibles on the bottom of page 9 hundred and six. It is the evening of Jesus' resurrection. He now appears to the ten disciples; Judas of course, isn't there, and Thomas is missing. We find that the disciples are grappling with what is happening. Here it is Sunday evening. The risen Christ has been seen earlier by some, but here the disciples are in the upper room with the doors locked for fear of the Jews. But, despite the locked doors, Jesus appears in their midst and greets them with the greeting still common today in that part of the world – Peace be with you.

But in this context the full significance of the word peace is present. In the Old Testament peace is closely associated with the blessing of God, especially the salvation to be brought by the Messiah. Now such peace has come, for "his Shalom!" on Easter evening is the complement of his cross on Friday where he says, "It is Finished." God's peace and now eternal life are imparted through Jesus. In verse 21, Jesus prepares them for mission. The commissioning before His deployment at Pentecost. Here he reunites them with his very life by the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word used for “breathed on” has the same meaning as the Hebrew word used in the Old Testament to describe God’s action when he formed Adam from the dust of the ground and “breathed into Adam’s face the breath of life.” All this happens the evening of that first day of resurrection, but Thomas is not present. The other disciples tell him they have seen the Lord, but Thomas does not believe them.

A week later, the next Sunday after the resurrection, the disciples, including Thomas, are all together again. But before I continue, I want us to think about this... The other disciples have seen Jesus, they have moved on to the next stage, but Thomas has not been able to move on. Thomas is still grappling with Jesus’ death. He is trapped, doubting what the others claim. Faith throughout the Gospels is depicted as progressive. Jesus described some people of His day as having little faith and others as having great faith. As our relationship with Jesus deepens, so does our faith. So, when Jesus appears to Thomas and the disciples, he challenges Thomas. Jesus is prompting Thomas to move forward in his faith.

This is an important lesson for us to get. Please hear this... To **NOT** move forward when Jesus calls us is like losing your anchor, and we begin to drift away. To **NOT** follow Jesus is moving away from Jesus. There is a dynamic here. Believing and unbelieving are dynamic; and, we are growing in one direction or the other. To get Thomas moving in the right direction, Jesus offers him the chance to feel his wounds. Jesus says in verse 27, for Thomas to put his finger into the marks of his hands and in his side. And then Jesus urges him to move on, to stop doubting and to believe.

The actual expression used in the Greek, in verse 27, captures the dynamic quality of this growth. The Greek word *ginomai* has the sense of “becoming” and of “a process as continually going on.” Verse 27 literally translates as: Stop becoming unbelieving and get on with becoming believing. It is this progressive nature of our Christian growth that Saint Anselm, one of the most important Christian thinkers of the eleventh century, gives us, the phrase: Ours is a “Faith seeking understanding.”

Anselm compels us to see that loving God... is seeking to know God. As Anselm intended: Faith seeking understanding moves us deeper and deeper into relationship with Jesus, to bring us to say, “My Lord and My God.” This is Thomas’s confession of Jesus. It is his immediate response to seeing Jesus and hearing his offer to touch his wounds. Jesus has invited Thomas to catch up with the others in their new stage of faith. And what does Thomas do... he not only catches up, he leaps to the top of the class.

As Christians, we can’t ever lose the Holy Spirit, but His filling presence is something we should constantly pursue. The business of sanctification is a lifelong process. Second Corinthian 3:18 says that we, in Christ, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory. But often the busyness of life gets in our way... No time for meaningful prayer; no time to read, especially if you can’t even find your Bible. The events of the day distracting us from what’s really important. But, by Grace, we have the Holy Spirit to convict and compel us to drop anchor. To catch back-up with our walk.

That's what I was going through. Days before graduation, I was called to Fort Gordon, Georgia, to receive my in-brief. After being in Clemson for over 18 months, it was time to return to real Army life. My in-brief included a security update. Early that year, March of 1992, President George Bush had signed into law the Torture Victim Protection Act. The background of several cases leading to this Act included over 2,000 Christians who were eradicated from their Iraqi towns and villages in 1988. Many tortured to death for their faith in ways that are just... to horrific to comprehend. Some perhaps looking at others suffering with stares of "hold on, don't deny Jesus." "Just a little longer, eternity with Him is worth it!"

As I sat there that graduation day, all I could think about was their faith. And my faith. Did I have that depth of faith? All I wanted was to have Jesus stand in front of me and say, "Stop becoming unbelieving and get on with becoming believing." And our God is so mighty to save that He does just that by the power of His Holy Spirit when we seek Him!

My Friends, Like Thomas, let our love for Jesus move us to be courageous and bold. To seek him. Let's open ourselves to God's compelling Holy Spirit; that we confess our hope in ultimate truth of HIS Victory over all sin, evil and death.

To let our Faith be as Charles Spurgeon beautifully states... A Faith that goes up the stairs that love has built... and looks out the windows which hope has opened. And when we fill empty, lost, or just flat, let's get back to Praying often, to Reading His Word, and to Obeying His Voice; sometimes the simple recipes bring the most comfort and healing.

"Stop becoming unbelieving
and get on with becoming believing."

Have you ever questioned your faith?

Let us pray: Father, by the power of your Holy Spirit keep ever moving forward in our faith – Following Jesus wherever he leads us; as each one of us exclaim Him as, "My Lord and my God." Amen.