

**The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon for April 12, 2026**  
**John 20:24-29 - "Everybody Doubts"**

O God, may the finger of your Spirit stir through the clutter of my words to point to a new understanding. Amen.

Today's reading is one of four post-resurrection stories in the Gospel of John. The first is the Easter morning narrative, in which Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb and finds the stone removed. She notifies Peter and the Beloved Disciple, who then come but leave for their homes. The second story in John's Gospel relates the appearance of the risen Jesus to Mary Magdalene. Those two scenes take up the first 18 verses in chapter 20.

The next two stories make up the reading for today. The first takes place with the disciples gathered at a house in the evening of Easter Day in or near Jerusalem, and there is an appearance of Jesus to his disciples, when Thomas is absent. The second narrates an appearance of Jesus to his disciples a week later when Thomas is present. No explanation is given for the gathering of the disciples but the reason for the disciples to meet behind locked doors is fear. They're hiding out because the person they thought would save them has died and they're sure their number is up next. They're lost and they don't know what to do now.

Jesus appears in the midst of the disciples and gives them the common Jewish greeting: "Peace" (or "Shalom"). He identifies himself by showing his hands and side. The reaction of the disciples is one of rejoicing. A commissioning follows. Jesus says that he had been sent by God, which leads into the "Johannine Pentecost". According to the Fourth Evangelist, the gift of the Spirit was bestowed on the evening of Easter Day itself, not on Pentecost some seven weeks later, as others have it. The disciples are immediately commissioned and given the Spirit as a power that will enable them to witness to Christ. Then the authorization to forgive sins completes the series of events on Easter Day.

All of these events are quite important, but it is the next scene that I'd like to focus on today. The scene that opens with the disciples gathered again in the house on the following Sunday, but this time Thomas is present. After Jesus first appeared to the disciples, they told an absent Thomas that they had seen the risen Lord. Thomas was emphatic about not believing unless he had the same experience. When Jesus later comes again to the house where the disciples were hiding, he invites Thomas to see and touch the wounds in his hands and side. He does not humiliate Thomas but gives him what he needs. Thomas confesses: "My Lord and my God!"

The final verse of the scene is a bit tricky. Jesus' lays out a final beatitude, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Is Jesus rebuking Thomas for not believing without seeing?

But Thomas didn't doubt Christ, he doubted his followers. He doubted those that gave witness to the risen Christ, perhaps because they showed no evidence. Thomas gets a lot of flak for doubting Jesus' return, but the rest of the disciples were no different. They didn't believe Mary when she announced that she had seen Jesus. Instead, two of them ran to the tomb to see it with their own eyes. They didn't believe Jesus when he appeared to them in the room. They needed him to show his scars. Even after

encountering the risen Christ, they were locking themselves in a room. Is there any wonder that Thomas didn't believe them? He *had* to ask questions; he *had* to make sure. So, is Thomas really all that different from the rest of the disciples?

John doesn't say why Thomas isn't in the room for the initial appearance of Jesus. It is assumed that Thomas was a doubter and lost his faith when Jesus died on the cross. But put yourself in Thomas' shoes. How would you feel after watching your teacher, mentor, friend die such a gruesome death? Maybe Thomas preferred to grieve alone so chose not to go to the upper room with the rest of the guys? What if Thomas, after watching Jesus die on the cross, wasn't in the room with the others because he had already gone back to his life? Does that make Thomas a doubter, or a realist? Thomas has been told by Jesus himself that by seeing Jesus he has seen God. So, when the disciples tell him three days after the crucifixion that they have seen Jesus alive, is it any wonder he wants to see for himself?

He knows what seeing Jesus means. Seeing Jesus means seeing God. Ah, yes, you might say, but he doesn't just want to see him, he says he will not believe until he does see him. But, here again, we see Thomas actually being faithful to Jesus. Because Jesus has told the disciples, "Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and 'The time is near!' Do not go after them." (Luke 21:8). Thomas will not be led astray. He's going to test. He must see for himself. After all, seeing is believing. He must ask questions; he must make sure. Ultimately, Thomas is both the one who sees and believes that Jesus has risen and the one who has not seen, but believes beyond seeing that Jesus is Lord.

I can relate to Thomas. I am a questioner, a doubter. My path to standing here today is full of doubt, and questions, and searching. I have never stopped asking questions. Does that make me less faithful to Christ, to God? Some might say so, but Jesus himself tells us to not accept things on blind faith. Truly, doubt is the pathway to faith. When we doubt, we probe, question, and search. Perhaps Thomas started with doubt, but he ended with the greatest testimony of the disciples, "My Lord and my God!"

In Thomas, we see the pattern of Christian evangelism established from the beginning of John's Gospel. One person encounters Jesus. Then they share their experience with the next person, who may express some reluctance. Then that person experiences Jesus on their own and becomes convinced about him and then shares the news about Jesus with the next person. Andrew tells Peter. Philip tells Nathanael. The Samaritan woman tells the townspeople. "Come and See" is the refrain.

With respect to the witness of the resurrected Jesus, Mary Magdalene starts it off. She encounters Jesus, shares the news; the others don't really buy it until they have their own experiences so that they can own the experience. They become convinced and then share it with Thomas. Like the other disciples, Thomas doesn't come to the fullest faith until he has his own experience. Then the story moves through the chain, and you and I are up next.

Thomas makes his confession and, through this text, testifies to us. Now what will we do? Will we hang in there with some level of interest and commitment until we encounter Jesus in a way that moves us to the next level? What evidence do we use to show that there is a risen Christ? If all we do is lock ourselves in rooms (sanctuaries, churches, institutions), then why would anyone believe that we have been changed by a miraculous experience? Do we actually believe that Jesus breathes the Spirit into us, asking to work on being disciples ourselves and then going into the world to talk about the faith and life we have in

Christ? Or do we prefer to sit in our locked rooms commiserating about what used to be? If nothing else, I hope that the story of Thomas shows us that Jesus' plan is not for us to sit in a locked room by ourselves.

In the end, it's not Thomas's doubting that matters; it's his believing. Everybody doubts; not everyone believes. Jesus addresses us who have not been eyewitnesses to the resurrection. We are also blessed when we believe. As John affirms, the whole of the gospel is given to us to help us believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and to have new life in his name. If we are unable to talk openly and clearly about the life Christ has called us to, then we will never be able to share that message with friends, family, neighbours, and others that we meet each day. We will be less likely to believe the promise of new life that Jesus gives us. And we will be unable to share with others why our faith is meaningful to us.

A life of discipleship calls us to our own spiritual growth, but also to sharing that faith. We need to unlock the doors and stop hiding in familiar spaces hoping the rest of the world won't bother us. If we take resurrection seriously, then we need to boldly and faithfully walk into the world knowing that God is waiting for us, working with us, and blessing us as we minister to all of God's creation. And we need to trust in the promise that God has already brought us into a new life.

I pray that we become a believing Thomas. That while we may start in doubt, we become awestruck and moved to proclaim to world "My Lord and my God!"

Amen