

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

April 24, 2022



BELIEVE

an act of incalculable boldness

by Drew Downs

In the story of "Doubting Thomas," we famously investigate belief. Which we so often chalk up to something we do. Or more specifically, something we agree to.

This, of course, undersells Thomas *and* belief.

In Christian tradition, the word *belief* does double duty. It is a verb and a noun. It is something you do *and* the thing to which you assent. So a *belief* is often comparable to

something. And to what someone else believes. We are given a *set of beliefs* by tradition, and the act of going along with them often defines what it means to believe.

Thomas gives us a different image, however. And one that is far more useful. He believes, not what the well-worn path of tradition has offered him, but what he sees. And he leaps. In an act of incalculable boldness. Which is something only he can do.

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Spring 2022

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

We are now in the Easter Season; a time marked with white stoles and alleluias!

For those new to the liturgical calendar, it can be quite interesting to see that we don't *just* celebrate Easter Day. Nor do we celebrate the time leading up to Easter as a kind of "pre" Easter. What we have is a season of Easter that runs for 50 days and culminates with Pentecost.

Living into a season rather than a single day takes a real adjustment in thinking. But more than that, I think, is that it requires us to slow down and let the richness and excitement breathe a little more.

Much like Christmas is really twelve days and we are called to resist the impulse to tear down the tree on Boxing Day and "get back to normal," Easter's lengthy time of celebrating the resurrected Christ invites us into a posture that requires a healthy dose of resistance. *To resist the impulse to normal.*

Because in the Resurrection, normal got changed. And the people going *back* to that other normal were walking in *the wrong direction*.

There is so much for us to wrestle with. Transformation and change. Christ's way of love evolving and shifting under our feet. The way forward for us now being different from what it was just a few years ago. All true. None of it easy. And yet, not one bit of that is new. Because Easter is a *season*, right? And we are **in it!**

With love,
Drew

LENT

Spring 2022

FOR SUNDAY

Second Sunday of Easter

April 24, 2022

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

From John 20:19-31

"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Reflection

I have always felt for Thomas. He missed out on the big show, then has to deal with his friends talking about how awesome it was to see Jesus again. We can *all* understand that feeling of missing out.

In the midst of this frustration and pain, Thomas makes a bold statement: "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."

What comes next? Jesus shows up and Thomas feels humiliated. Because of course he would after that!

LENT

I'm not sure that's *exactly* how it plays out, but it sure *feels* like it is. Like Jesus is shaming Thomas for not trusting his friends. Or perhaps for wanting what they had. Neither is a particularly shame-worthy idea.

What I notice, however, is that Thomas asks to **see** and to **touch** Jesus. He doesn't just need *visual* proof, but *physical* proof as well. This is central to his statement. I can imagine him saying to his buddies, *Yeah, OK, you might have **seen** Jesus, but that doesn't mean he was really there. I'm not buying it until I get **real** proof.*

So what happens when Jesus shows up? Thomas doesn't touch him! Where's Mr. Tough Guy I-won't-believe-unless-I-put-my-fingers-in-the-wounds Thomas now? Well, he believes, of course!

While I think it is very easy to shame Thomas as "doubting" or sympathizing greatly with his realistic approach to hearing about the resurrection, I suspect we are actually paying too much attention to personality and voice and not enough on what is *actually* said. For Thomas demands to see and touch, but in the moment, he doesn't even need to touch. Blessed are those who don't even need to see. So blessed are we in reading Scripture. For we neither see nor touch and yet we believe.

It is easy to get tied up in the logistics of faith. *How do we do it? What words do we use? Who is allowed to do what?* But it can be hard to live into a life of faith that relies solely on...well...faith. As in faith in each other. Faith in institutions. Faith in traditions. Because we get let down. Things go wrong. And we're often feeling left behind.

It was far easier to follow Jesus when he was right in front of them. Harder when he's gone and they have to figure things out. **We** have it even harder. And yet we still may believe. Not because we've *seen him* or *touched him* but because we witnessed him through other people. And we are blessed through believing.

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