

## April 8 Baptism – Adalee Jones

Preaching the Sunday after Easter always feels like the follow up episode of a show that was ‘to be continued...’. It feels like after the bigness of Easter we need to regroup and remember where we are in the story.

So, when we last saw Jesus he told Mary to tell the other disciples that he’d see them in just a little bit. That was Easter morning...early on Easter morning. So, Mary went, told them that Jesus would be stopping by. No big deal, right? Jesus was dead, now he’s alive again and he’ll be by for dinner.

The gospel accounts of Easter don’t actually end with the empty tomb on Easter morning. It can feel like that because that’s the part of the story we tell on Easter Sunday morning, which isn’t bad, but it’s just always good to remember that it’s also not the end of the unfolding of the resurrection.

Really, there’s a good news story for those who like to sleep in, those who weren’t up and at ‘em when Mary was, too. Let’s hear how things went during the rest of that day and that week.

John 20: 19-31

*<sup>19</sup> It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” <sup>22</sup> Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you don’t forgive them, they aren’t forgiven.”*

*<sup>24</sup> Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn’t with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> The other disciples told him, “We’ve seen the Lord!” But he replied, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won’t believe.”*

*<sup>26</sup> After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!”*

*<sup>28</sup> Thomas responded to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!”*

*<sup>29</sup> Jesus replied, “Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don’t see and yet believe.”*

*<sup>30</sup> Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples' presence, signs that aren't recorded in this scroll. <sup>31</sup> But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.*

Thomas doubted and it has been his legacy. But what if the author had perceived Thomas's reservations differently and we came to know him as Thorough Thomas, or Curious Thomas, or Cautious Thomas?

What if, rather than being stubborn in his doubt or shallow or lacking faith, what if Thomas was simply sad and trying to protect his heart? What if he was just like any of us might be if we hadn't been there when the rest of our close-knit group got to see Jesus as Risen Lord and we weren't there? What if he was more like Pouting Thomas than Doubting Thomas.

It's good for us to notice that Jesus voluntarily showed his hands and his side to the disciples when he went to visit them. They didn't have to ask for verification. He revealed himself to be the very same one who had died on his own. Thomas simply asked for a first-hand experience of the Risen Lord Jesus before he was going to trust. He had hoped in Jesus' power once and it hadn't ended quite like he'd expected, so he's just wanting some assurance.

And who among us hasn't held out a part of our hearts and lives for a first-hand experience of Jesus. We are part of those whom Jesus calls happy because we believe without seeing him literally with our eyeballs, but that doesn't mean that our belief just comes full and complete all at once in our lives of faith.

No, in my experience, we all have a little doubting or thorough or heart-protecting Thomas in us and we grow in our believing Jesus to be real, to be enough, to be trusted with our whole lives and our broken hearts.

That's what was being asked of Thomas and the others. They were asked to trust in the Resurrected Jesus, not with robust faith and a belief that said – of course, Jesus is alive, he said it, I believe it, the end. Please remember that everyone expected to find Jesus dead in that grave on Sunday morning. Everyone. Those who loved Jesus and those who hated Jesus all expected his death to stick. It generally does (there are a few exceptions, but those resurrections were all temporary restorations and were all done by the power of God through an alive Jesus so the likelihood of Jesus raising himself wasn't on anybody's mind).

So, a resurrection faith is really and truly a faith in the absurd. It's faith that keeps believing in the face of doubt. And as Thomas shows us, it's faith that asks for exactly what it needs. And even though Jesus speaks truth about those who will be happy as they believe even without seeing, I invite us to hear those words as a proclamation of joy for others, and not a scolding of Thomas.

And just as I don't think that Thomas was scolded by Jesus, but loved so much that Jesus made it a point to show up and help Thomas to believe – perhaps even to mend his broken heart – I think that whatever is holding us back from fully believing Jesus to be alive and active right now in our lives in 2018 is an opportunity for Jesus to show up and reveal himself to be alive and to be exactly who he says he is – the way, the truth, the life, the vine to which we are connected, the bread of life, the Good Shepherd – all of it.

And I don't mean this as an invitation to test God and say to God – if you really loved me you would do x, y, or z. That's not what I see going on very specifically between Thomas and Jesus. What Thomas wanted was assurance of Jesus and Jesus alone. He didn't leverage his belief on any kind of success, finances, physical healing, or miracle apart from the very person of Jesus himself. Thomas wasn't holding out or playing hard to get. Thomas was a fully invested follower of Jesus and had not abandoned the other disciples or withdrawn from them. Thomas was always all in, but Thomas also had a brain in his head and while he didn't think the others were lying to him, he simply needed a little more experience of his own. A firsthand knowledge. And really, who wouldn't feel a little left out if you leave for a minute and Jesus stops by on the day he is raised from the dead?

Therefore, if what our broken, bruised, timid, or hesitant hearts need in order to believe in the life and vitality and truth of the Jesus others have seen and bear witness to, is to see Jesus, to find Jesus, for ourselves, heart to heart if not eyeball to eyeball...then I encourage any of us to ask for Jesus to reveal himself to us.

God is not hiding. God is ready and waiting to be found. In Luke 11: 9-13 Jesus is teaching his disciples and tells them, *"<sup>9</sup> And I tell you: Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> Everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds. To everyone who knocks, the door is opened.*

*<sup>11</sup> "Which father among you would give a snake to your child if the child asked for a fish? <sup>12</sup> If a child asked for an egg, what father would give the child a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"*

Seek and you will find. Have you ever stopped and thought about that. If we put any effort into seeking God at all, we will find him. Have you ever played hide and seek with a toddler? They hide in the middle of rooms. They hide in the most obvious places. And when toddlers play hide and seek, they want to be found. I'm not saying God is a toddler, but I am saying that the desire to be found, the desire to be connected and not lost, the desire to have someone looking for you, is quite godly.

And while the main point of Jesus' death is the payment of our sins, we need to think a little further about why God decided to pay the debt of all our sin. Jesus paid it all so that we can be in the presence of God – in an ongoing loving, worshiping – relationship with God for eternity. Jesus dealt with sin but dealing with sin wasn't the goal, it was the hard work that made the goal of redemption and reunion a reality.

Jesus died so exactly to bring people into a relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So, why wouldn't Jesus come to see his friend, Thomas, when Thomas needed to see him? Why wouldn't Jesus come to see you or me or anyone else who just really needs to see him, to hear him, to know that he is really there?

Jesus is real. Jesus is alive. And even though right now Jesus reigns at the right hand of God the Father, we can connect with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is an extension of Jesus's presence just like the gospel of John makes so clear that anyone who has seen the Son has seen the Father. So, any of us who have encountered the Holy Spirit, felt the presence of God, held the truth of God through scriptures, we have seen God. We have seen Jesus.

One day we'll meet face to face, but that doesn't mean that we can't reach out for Jesus when we need him right here on this earth. There is no shame in taking time to trust God with our whole hearts – which is undoubtedly the goal – whole heart and life transformation – but such a deep and abiding trust takes time and experience with God.

The Christian life isn't about successfully navigating life breaking as few rules as possible. The Christian life is about Christ. It is about being close to Christ Jesus our Risen Lord. It is about drawing near.

We sing about such things, right? We sing our faith. "I am Thine O Lord" says,  
*"I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice,  
And it told Thy love to me;  
But I long to rise in the arms of faith  
And be closer drawn to Thee.*

*Refrain:*

*Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord,  
To the cross where Thou hast died;  
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord,  
To Thy precious, bleeding side."*

We don't draw near to the cross, to Jesus' death or to his bleeding side because we are fascinated with the gruesome side of death, but because the cross was the ultimate expression of love. The arms of Jesus spread wide were opened to hold us all, to embrace us as we choose to draw near.

It can be really hard to trust our actual lives to Jesus. That might sound strange, but I'm speaking my truth as one who has trusted Jesus more and more and more over the course of my whole life. And the more God shows himself to be fully faithful in love, the more I trust God with my fragile parts. And we all have fragile parts. That's part of being human.

No matter how successful we are, no matter how much money we earn, no matter how popular or pretty or strong or healthy, no matter how helpful we are, there are parts of us that have been wounded and parts of us that are tender that we may not ever tell anybody about. And I don't mean sins. I mean our hearts, our hopes, our fears, and our feelings. We are a delicate lot and it is the very delicate nature of us that can lead to sin or can lead us to Jesus.

Friends, there is no shame in being like Thomas. There is no shame in needing Jesus so very much that you make it clear to even other faithful folks that you just really need to see Jesus to believe. You can hear me preach about Jesus, you can read the Bible, and you can hear other people tell you about their very true, very real stories of their experiences with Jesus, but sometimes we each need to encounter Jesus for ourselves. And that's not just okay. That's good.

As we live together as Easter people, as the body of Christ alive in the world, some people will encounter Christ Jesus because they encounter us and that's amazing. But if there is anyone here today who is just yearning to encounter Jesus so that you can just be closer to him, I invite you ask. Just ask. Ask Jesus to reveal himself in your heart and life in a way that you can recognize him.

And if you want a reminder of the very real life of Christ I will be glad to anoint you with my balm of gladness today with the words "See and believe!" ...Let us pray.