

A World of Doubt
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In today's gospel reading, Jesus appears to his apostles after rising from the dead. He brings them peace and calls them to be messengers for God. The moment would be miraculous however it happened, but the story takes on a second meaning because Thomas wasn't there to witness it.

Can we begin to imagine what that was like?

Five days earlier, Jesus was arrested, and within twenty-four hours, he was dead. Crucified. Thomas's lord and master, his rabbi, his friend — someone he spent every day with for the last three years, guiding him, comforting him, being there for him and the other apostles when no one else in the world was. Now Jesus is gone, and if that isn't bad enough, Thomas and the other apostles find themselves targets. Jesus asked them to leave everything they knew and follow him. Now, left with nothing, and the whole world against them, they hide there in that house and they wait.

At some point, Thomas leaves. Maybe he wants to be on his own, you know? Maybe he wants some fresh air. Maybe he's trying to gauge the general feelings of the people of Jerusalem, or maybe during the day all the apostles came and went as they pleased, and Thomas was just late getting back. Or maybe, he was out on an errand for the others.

But when he returns, he gets some startling news:

"Dude, you'll never believe this," they tell him. "Jesus was here. You missed him by, like, that much."

Can you imagine Thomas's reaction? — his surprise turning to disappointment, turning to denial?

"Man, I can't believe you weren't here. Jesus talked to us and everything. It was awesome."

We all know what Thomas says in reply:

“I will not believe,” he tells them. “And I won’t until I see him with my own eyes and touch his wounds with my own fingers. Until pigs fly and Elvis takes up singing again and Simon returns to *American Idol*. Oh... Simon Cowell, I mean. Sorry, not you, Simon Peter.”

From that point on, we know him as Doubting Thomas. His name, like the names of Judas and Benedict Arnold and John Hancock became synonymous with his actions. He doubts Jesus once and is forever branded a doubter.

But that’s not fair of us, is it? The other apostles weren’t required to have faith before they saw Jesus. They were just in the right place at the right time. They all saw with their own eyes what they expected Thomas to believe without seeing.

I think that when Thomas says he won’t believe, it’s because he’s afraid of disappointment. I mean, after all the miracles he witnessed when Jesus was alive, he could not be lacking in faith. But he’s been through a lot, hasn’t he, and he doesn’t want to get his hopes up for nothing. No, he wants physical proof and until he has it, he won’t take anyone’s word for it.

And Thomas could be afraid to believe because of what believing means. If he were to believe that Jesus can rise from the dead, and, in so doing, defeat death, then what does that do to all of our preconceived truths of what’s possible and what isn’t?

And what does it mean for the rest of us? Maybe we can’t rise from the dead or walk on water, but we can do just about anything else.

Look at all the people who have overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles in life, while so many of the rest of us trudge around feeling hopeless because, so far, we haven’t achieved what we wanted. Helen Keller overcame deafness and blindness to be a motivation for others. Stephen Hawking refused to let a brilliant mind remain trapped in a body that others would think is useless to him. The world is full of remarkable people who push the boundaries of what the rest of us consider as real possibilities.

Those motivated people aren't the exception to our rules. We are the exception to God's rules.

With God, anything is possible. But Thomas forgets that. He returns home expecting to find his friends as he left them — scared, alone, cast off from society. Instead he meets a roomful of excited people renewed in their faith.

It's easier to doubt ourselves and doubt God's plan than it is to go out there and do something amazing.

But Jesus would remind us, as he does Thomas, that those who believe without seeing will be blessed with more than they could imagine, not only in the afterlife, but on earth too. We can't achieve greatness without first taking risks. And what is a risk if we can see the outcome?

Jesus seems to single out Thomas more than he does the others, but maybe that's because he knows Thomas has more to offer than he believes of himself.

What do you have to offer? What is your purpose on earth?

Jesus told the apostles, "As the father has sent me, so I send you." In your life today, how are you answering that call?