

John 20:19-31

20:19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

20:20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

20:21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

20:22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

20:23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

20:24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

20:25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

20:26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

20:27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

20:28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

20:29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

20:30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

20:31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Do you remember the Alexander Hamilton song *The Room Where it Happens*? The lyrics are "I want to be in the room where it happens, the room where it happens, the room where it happens!" Thomas was not in the room where it happens.

The scripture reading starts on that first Easter Sunday in the evening and then jumps to a week later. After the tomb is found empty, Jesus appears to the disciples. We don't know where Thomas is or why he's not there. We do know why the others are there. They are **afraid**. That's something that we don't always highlight, but fear is one of the dominant emotions that is mentioned around Easter. Last week's text from the gospel of Mark says that the women left the empty tomb and they "**said nothing to anyone for they were terrified.**" This text begins: ¹⁹ **It was still the first day of the week. That evening, the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid.**

It is worth remembering that any **transformation** takes time, but it also moves through different emotions and phases. They had heard talk of the tomb being empty and a couple of them had seen the empty tomb, but they were still afraid and behind locked doors.

That first Easter evening, Jesus appears and brings his living presence and peace. But Thomas misses it. Man, sucks to be Thomas! I don't know where he was ... maybe he was getting some more supplies, maybe he was finding out more information about what these rumours were about. Whatever the reason, he misses the biggest thing ever! The appearing of Jesus risen from the dead. When the disciples are all: "Oh man, you missed it! It was so awesome! He was here, like literally here. Really him. Oh, you should have been there!!" Thomas doesn't share their joy. Maybe he's annoyed that he missed it. I almost wonder if he had already made up his mind about rumours circulating.

Thomas doesn't respond to the news with "Oh that's so great to hear! What wonderful news!" No. He says: "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." He had made up his mind. Because of this statement we have labelled Thomas "Doubting Thomas." I think today we can relate to Thomas more than ever before. We live in a world of increasing disinformation. And now AI has and is taking the potential for disinformation to much higher levels. Take a look at this TikTok:

<https://www.tiktok.com/@brian..smith/video/7325215629538004256>

(This is a digital version of Brian and though it uses his voice, he has never himself spoken these sentences. This digital version can speak any language or say anything you want it/him to say and it looks and sounds almost identical to real Brian.) It's a bit mind blowing. It would not be so difficult for someone to use the video and audio content that I have online and make a video that has me, in my voice, and use it to say something I've never said. (Don't even think about it Eric! 😊) It could be used to have me inciting hate or promoting products I don't use. So you can understand why people went a little crazy when it was discovered the Mother's Day photo of Princess Kate and the children was photoshopped. I am not all doomsday on AI ... I think it has great potential to increase productivity. And it is here and everywhere, so we need to understand it and use it wisely.

Now Thomas was not suspecting some kind of AI-generated resurrection from the dead; today he would have been. But he had questions and doubts. I want to point out that **Jesus doesn't seem to have a problem with that**. After all, when Jesus comes back a week later it seems like it was just for Thomas. The second time, a week later, after saying "**Peace be with you**" the first thing he says is: "**Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.**" I love that Jesus was not going to leave Thomas behind. He doesn't judge Thomas, he loves him and returns specifically to speak to him.

Questions and doubts are part of faith. In this day and age it's probably good to have questions and doubts. Of course if those questions and doubts lead you to never trust anyone or anything, then it's not a good thing.

When people ask, 'How can you know if Christianity is the right path versus other religions or thoughts?' I use an image that my father shared of people who are at the

bottom of a mountain and wanting to climb up to the top. The top represents understanding, enlightenment, a sense of being close to God and the meaning of life. It's okay to circle the mountain from the bottom and study where the different paths might lead. I can't tell you about the other paths — I think some of them, maybe even many of them lead to the top. I don't know about those. I only know about this one called Christianity and the way of following Jesus. In my experience it's a good path that leads towards loving God and loving others, loving creation. If you are trying to figure out if the path you are following is a good one, ask yourself "Is it leading towards more good in the world? Does it bring more peace, healing, justice, love?"

It won't necessarily be easy, but it should lead to goodness and healing in you and in the world around you.

You can look closely at all the paths, but at so **you have to start climbing**. Because you can spend your whole life circling that mountain at the bottom and never getting anywhere, except going around in a circle of fear and skepticism and probably going with the crowd of whatever your tribe says and believes.

For me that's probably the **biggest sign of the resurrection of Jesus being real** is that this group of very ordinary and very afraid people ended up leaving that room and going out and sharing the good news that Jesus was alive. They don't just talk about it — they begin sharing their food and their resources and looking after those who are sick. They care for others in a way that didn't make sense to many around them. They were **transformed**.

But skeptic or not, one thing is absolutely clear. Thomas became certain that Jesus was still alive. I say that because Thomas went on to be one of the greatest of apostles of the early Christian church. The tradition and the evidence is very persuasive that he went eastward carrying the gospel into Persia, and eventually reached the shores of India. The Mar Thoma Church of Kerala in South India was founded by St. Thomas. We had Christian friends who taught in India for several years and they shared the history with us that Christianity was not a recent arrival there.

Western Church historians initially were skeptical over the claim that St. Thomas reached India. But they could not deny that when Europeans first reached the shores of India in the 15th century, they found a Christian Church already there. Where did it come from? And more recently archaeological evidence has established that there was a Christian Church in South India by the 3rd century. There is little doubt now that it was there even earlier. What that means is that Christianity was in India long before it was in Western Europe. Thomas— the man who said he didn't believe it — was the one responsible for the gospel being spread so widely in the far east.

A healthy amount of doubts and questions are good. They can lead you into a deeper faith. It can lead you to a faith that has roots.

When Jesus was trying to tell the disciples, before his death, that he was going to suffer and die and rise again to life, he says to them in John 14: ***"for a little while the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also***

... And you know the way where I am going.” Clearly none of them had any idea of what Jesus was talking about. It was Thomas who spoke out and said “We don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Do you remember that? Do you remember how Jesus responded? He said **“I am the way, the truth and the life.”**

I don’t know about you but I so long for an anchor in the overwhelm of a changing world and in a time of huge disinformation campaigns. Sometimes it seems so hard to know what is right and what is good. I have found that anchor in the person of Jesus. Even with all of my own fear and uncertainty, I have found a peace and a North Star.

Alexie Navalny found that too. Navalny was the outspoken Russian critic of Putin and the corruption in Russia. He died in a Russian penal colony (he was almost certainly killed) at the age of 47 just a month and a half ago. What gave Alexie an anchor to stand firm in the face of threats and being poisoned? It was his faith. Three years before his death, on February 20, 2021, Navalny spoke about his faith during the closing statement at his trial. His [final public words](#) included this testimony:

“If you want I’ll talk to you about God and salvation, I’ll turn up the volume of heartbreak to the maximum, so to speak. The fact is that I am a Christian, which usually rather sets me up as an example for constant ridicule in the Anti-Corruption Foundation, because mostly our people are atheists, and I was once quite a militant atheist myself.

But now I am a believer, and that helps me a lot in my activities, because everything becomes much, much easier. I think about things less. There are fewer dilemmas in my life, because there is a book in which, in general, it is more or less clearly written what action to take in every situation. It’s not always easy to follow this book, of course, but I am actually trying. And so, as I said, it’s easier for me, probably, than for many others, to engage in politics. ...

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.’

I’ve always thought that this particular commandment is more or less an instruction to activity. And so, while certainly not really enjoying the place where I am, I have no regrets about coming back, or about what I’m doing. It’s fine, because I did the right thing. On the contrary, I feel a real kind of satisfaction. Because at some difficult moment I did as required by the instructions, and did not betray the commandment.”

Alexei Navalny, 1976-2024 (Google translation from trial script in 2021)

Jesus comes back and invites Thomas to touch the scars and to believe that he truly is alive. Face to face with Jesus, Thomas no longer has to touch. He proclaims an incredible faith statement: “My Lord and my God!”

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” Jesus says. Blessed are those Thomas shared the good news with in India, blessed was Alexie Navalny. Blessed are you who have found the way, the truth and the life. A rock on which to stand. And if you are not sure yet, that’s ok. Jesus loves you and won’t leave you behind.

Thanks be to God.