

What would Thomas do?

During the recent Easter services I heard this passage read as I've heard it many, many times. But this time I was struck by Thomas.

What do we know about Thomas? We know from Matthew, Mark and Luke he was called as one of the 12 apostles. The Scriptures usually say "Thomas, who was called the Twin." Wait... what?? Whose twin? It is actually a bit amusing to read some of the commentaries on this. Some of them note that in Greek the word for Thomas sounds like "twin". Some commentaries point out it is a nickname -- but aren't clear why. One suggests that Thomas was rather short, so Twin became a nickname for "hey shorty -- where's the other half?" Another suggested that physically Thomas and Jesus looked very similar and thus the apostles started calling him Twin.

Some translations use "Didymus" with a note that this is Greek for twin. The word may denote working with both hands. It was a common word for twin.

Whatever the reason, it really doesn't matter. Because today we know him by a different nickname don't we? Doubting Thomas. But did he really doubt? I have some ideas I want to share on that.

We now remember (from the reading from John 11) that he was with Jesus when Lazarus got sick and died. Jesus wants to go to Judea to be with Mary and Martha. The disciples protest and Jesus tells them pretty plainly that Lazarus has died and he wants to go. Thomas seems almost fatalistic in his reply "*Let us also go, that we may die with him.*" You can hear that in his voice, right? And I'm sure there were deep sighs -- and maybe some eye rolling going on. OK, Jesus, we all know you have antagonized the religious leaders and they will get even. And Bethany is right there in the shadow of Jerusalem, right where they want him. Let's go - all for one and one for all!

The rest of the apostles were not making eye contact with Jesus or anyone else; this was not what they had signed up for! This was not what everyone else was thinking; I'm sure a couple of them were thinking of some really good excuses for going somewhere else. But off to Bethany they go and the religious leaders do not bother them on this trip. It was an amazing thing to see the family and friends (and Jesus) mourning Lazarus; to see Mary and Martha so grief-stricken. And then to see Lazarus come stumbling out of that tomb. Wow!

A little bit later, as Passover approached, Jesus returns to Jerusalem. He rides into town on a donkey with crowds cheering him on. He makes plans to celebrate the Passover supper with his apostles in an upstairs room. During the course of the dinner he washes their feet and predicts his betrayal and Peter's denial. At the end of chapter 13 (verse 33) Jesus tells them he is leaving soon. Peter asks where he is going and Jesus replied "Where I am going you cannot follow now but you will follow later" (v. 36). The apostles are puzzled, confused and distressed. What happened to the excitement just 4 days ago? Jesus speaks to comfort his dear friends in that wonderful passage we read from John 14: 1-4. Thomas speaks up, asking the question that is probably on everyone's mind: we don't know where you are going, so how do we know the way? As a result of that question we get that wonderful response from Jesus "I am the way, the truth, and the life". How much comfort we have received from these words!

Then a few horrible days later, we hear from Thomas again. Let's look a bit closer at the passage from John 20. We know this story so well that we tend to rush through it to get through the hurt and confusion. It is now the day we call Easter Sunday; later in the day following the discovery of the empty tomb. Let's settle in and read it as for the first time: (from The Message)

*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 After he said this, **he showed them his hands and his side**. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ----- (skipping now to verse 24)*

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

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

Do you see what we've skipped over too many times? Look back at verse 20: Jesus showed them his hands and his side. How else were they to know that it really was him? And they rejoiced! When they next saw Thomas, the words were tripping all over each other in their

excitement. You've been like that, right? So excited you couldn't get the words out and everyone in the group trying to share their excitement. I can hear it "Thomas! We saw the Lord. He showed us his hands and his side... He's ALIVE and he talked to us". And what does Thomas say? The same thing every one of us would have said "well, I haven't seen it and I won't believe it until I do and can touch him". So we call him Doubting Thomas for the next 2000 years. Then notice verse 26 – a week later Jesus appears to the apostles and Thomas is there. And he realizes he doesn't have to touch Jesus to believe it – it is obvious that Jesus is alive and well!

Well, this is all very interesting you say. But what does this all have to do with me? I suggest that we can take some lessons from Thomas.

- 1) We should actively doubt things, including faith.

Frederick Buechner said in [Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC](#)

“if you don't have doubts you're either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants-in-the-pants of faith. They keep it alive and moving.”

Having doubts means you are thinking about something – and that you care about it. If you are preparing dinner just for yourself, you don't really worry over it, do you? But if you are preparing a meal for special friends, you worry over it – you doubt yourself... Does this need more salt? Should I put flowers on the table? Will they like the dessert? What if no one shows up! You care about your friends and the special time you will have together.

- 2) We should step out in faith more – even when it doesn't seem like faith! Thomas did that when he said “let's go, even if it means death for us too”. He wasn't sure what exactly was waiting them in Bethany, but he knew he wanted to be with Jesus no matter what. He didn't say “well, I really wanted to stay here for a bit, it's really nice here and there is no one yelling at us or getting angry with you. Let's just sit here until it all blows over”.

We can step out in faith more – what does the future hold for our congregation? We don't know, but we need to prepare for a new pastor and the exciting new things that come with change! We can increase our giving (time and money) to be sure we are ready. We can move out of our comfort zone to try new things.. sometimes it is really

nice to keep doing what you've always done because it often doesn't require anything extra. But to stay alive we have to change.

- 3) We should not hesitate to ask or state the obvious. We can often grow when we drop our assumptions. "Good grief, Jesus! Peter just said we didn't know where you are going, but you just won't let it go. Now you're talking about a house with a lot of rooms and preparing it for us. Well, that's just great... we have no idea where this place is so how are we supposed to join you?" The response was not just for Thomas, but for all who would follow Jesus: "I am the way and the truth and the life".

What is the obvious question waiting to be asked now? Maybe it's "who will be our next pastor" or "When will the new pastor be here?" or "How will we afford to pay for staff?" Or maybe the obvious question is "How can I be more like Thomas?"

Let's look back at Thomas, the Twin. We said at the beginning that we didn't know why he was called The Twin. But what if – just maybe – he really did look and act like Jesus? Don't we want to be Thomas' Twin in our actions? Don't we want to ask the question "What would Jesus do?" and respond with our actions that match the answer? The obvious answer is "YES".

And to God be the Glory... Amen.