

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

March 30, 2008

[] = Instructions for worship planners and worship leaders: delete from the worship folder
() = Information for the congregation: include in the worship folder and/or PowerPoint.

[Note: **Worship Alive Plus!** is designed to be useable/adaptable in planning contemporary, blended and “fresh traditional” worship.]

[Revised Common Lectionary © 2007 WorshipOutlet.com by Julie Koenemann and Rev. Maxwell Quinn]

WORSHIP THEME: “Thomas: Your Twin?”

It is so easy to hear the account of the doubting Thomas and criticize him for not believing when He had the risen Christ right in front of him! After all, we wouldn't doubt like that had we been there and saw the Savior in plain sight. Or would we? Is Thomas maybe your twin brother? Many times the Lord calls us to faith yet we plead for a “sign.” This morning we take a close look at Jesus response and call to faith for not only Thomas but for each of us!

+ WE PREPARE OUR HEARTS +

[Worship Planners: A Worship CD and/or the praise team can play in the background 10-15 minutes before the service.]

OPENING PRAYER: [This prayer is offered as an idea — “Lord Christ, we are here to celebrate You! We have stood before Your empty tomb, and have rejoiced in Your victory over sin and death. Fill us with Your Spirit, that we might be able to proclaim, 'My Lord and my God', and know that Your victory is ours. Amen.]

INVOCATION AND INTRODUCTION OF TODAY'S THEME

Pastor: Welcome! We have much to celebrate! We are the people of God! We begin in His name:

People: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pastor: On this day, our celebration still focuses on the empty tomb, and the victory of Christ.

People: He died for our sins, and rose again to give us life.

Pastor: And there is even more to celebrate, as we think of the words of the risen Christ, spoken to His first disciples and to us:

People: "Peace be with you."

Pastor: He is risen!

People: He is risen indeed!

Pastor: He is risen!

People: And in him, we rise to walk in newness of life!

TIME OF CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Pastor: Even as we celebrate, we are aware of our need to confess. Yet we confess our sins and our sinfulness, not as those who have no hope - but as those who know the grace and power of our God. Trusting in Him alone, we make confession.

(a brief silence)

Pastor: Father, we come as Your people, acknowledging our sinfulness, relying upon Your grace.

People: Forgive us Father, for the times we live as if Christ were still in the tomb.
Forgive us for the times we remain buried in our sins, dead to the guiding of Your Spirit.
Forgive us for the times we are like Thomas, who proclaimed "I will not believe".

(A time of personal reflection and confession)

Pastor: The empty tomb proclaims the Gospel of Christ. He died for us, as the sacrifice for our sins. Our sins are no more. Our sins were crucified with Christ. He was raised by the Father, that those who believe in Him might also rise to walk in newness of life, here and now, and for all eternity. To those who believe, He gives power to become the children of God, rejoicing in the power of the resurrection. Christ is "Our Lord and our God!"

People: Lord, I believe you are the resurrection and the life. Remove my doubts, and fill me with Your Spirit. Amen

RESPONSE

Consuming Fire

[ATBS 2:134; WT 6:13; WT 7:9]

Tim Hughes

Chorus

**Consuming Fire fan into flame A passion for Your name
Spirit of God fall in this place Lord have Your way
Lord have Your way with us**

There must be more than this O breath of God come breathe within
There must be more than this Spirit of God we wait for You
Fill us anew we pray Fill us anew we pray

Come like a rushing wind Clothe us with power from on high
Now set the captives free Leave us abandoned to Your praise
Lord let Your glory fall Lord let Your glory fall

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Traditional

The Day of Resurrection ELW 361; LSB 478; BH 164; HWC 226; PH 118; UMC 303

TIME OF GREETING

TIME OF PRAISE AND WORSHIP

[choose 2 or 3 of the songs listed below or from elsewhere in this service]

Unchanging

[WT 5:66; SSA]

Chris Tomlin

Great is Your faithfulness
Great is Your faithfulness
You never change You never fail O God

True are Your promises
True are Your promises
You never change You never fail O God

Chorus

**So we raise up holy hands
To praise the Holy One
Who was and is and is to come
Yeah we raise up holy hands
To praise the Holy One
Who was and is and is to come**

Wide is Your love and grace
Wide is Your love and grace
You never change You never fail O God

Ending

You were You are You will always be
You were You are You will always be

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I Am Free

[HMS 20:1590]

also www.songselect.com; www.iwillworship.com; www.pwarchive.com;
www.praisecharts.com

Jon Egan

Chorus 1

**I am free to run I am free to run
I am free to dance I am free to dance
I am free to live for You I am free to live for You
I am free I am free**

Through You the blind will see Through You the mute will sing
Through You the dead will rise Through You all hearts will praise
Through You the darkness flees Through You my heart screams I am free

Chorus 2

**I am free to run I am free to run
I am free to dance I am free to dance**

**I am free to live for You I am free to live for You
I am free I am free
Yeah I am free I am free**

Chorus 3

**I am free to run I am free to run
I am free to dance I am free to dance
I am free to live for You I am free to live for You
O I am free I am free
I am free I am free**

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My Savior, My God

[<http://www.greatworshipsongs.com>;

<http://ws3.allaccesstoday.com/aaronshust/Search.aspx?Keyword=my+savior> – very much suggest you do the version in the key of C because D or E is so high for those sustained high notes!]

Aaron Shust / Dorothy Greenwell

Chorus

**My Savior loves My Savior lives
My Savior's always there for me My God He was
My God He is My God is always gonna be
My Savior loves My Savior lives
My Savior's always there for me My God He was
My God He is My God is always gonna be**

I am not skilled to understand What God has willed what God has planned
I only know at His right hand Stands One who is my Savior

I take Him at His word and deed Christ died to save me this I read
And in my heart I find a need Of Him to be my Savior

Ending

That He would leave His place on high And come for sinful man to die
You count it strange so once did I Before I knew my Savior

Yes living dying let me bring My strength my solace from this spring
That He who lives to be my King Once died to be my Savior

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[Traditional Options]:

Christ the Lord is Risen Today, Alleluia ELW 369; LSB 463; LBW 128; LW 137; CH 367
In Thee Is Gladness ELW 867; LSB 818; LW 442

[Optional: Children's Message and/or Dismissal to Children's Church]

+ WE HEAR GOD'S WORD +

[It is suggested that the introductions be read out loud as well as the Scripture itself]

FIRST READING Acts 2:14a; 22-32

Peter addresses the gathered people on Pentecost, proclaiming that Jesus, the Son of God, was given up to crucifixion, but then raised again.

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. . .

²² "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵ David said about him:

" 'I saw the Lord always before me.

Because he is at my right hand,

I will not be shaken.

²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

my body also will live in hope,

²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the grave,

nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

²⁹ "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

SECOND LESSON 1 Peter 1:3-9

Our hope is in the resurrection of Jesus. While we suffer trials "in the meantime", the outcome of our hope is salvation.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

GOSPEL John 20:19-31

Jesus appeared to the disciples in the locked room, and blessed the disciples with His peace. Thomas was not present, and declared he would not believe what the other disciples proclaimed. Eight days later, Thomas saw the risen Savior and professed: "My Lord and My God."

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors 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 side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

MESSAGE "Thomas: Your Twin?"

[NOTE: See "Sermon Starters & Seasonings" provided at the end of this service]

+ WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD +

[NOTE: Optional location for Confession/Absolution, using materials found earlier in this service]

RESPONSE

Lord I Believe In You

[\[www.praisecharts.com\]](http://www.praisecharts.com)

Tommy Walker

Chorus 1

**Lord I believe in You I'll always believe in You
Though I can't see You with my eyes Deep in my heart Your presence I find
Lord I believe in You And I'll keep my trust in You
Let the whole world say what they may No one can take this joy away
Lord I believe**

Though I can't see Your holy holy face
And Your throne in heaven above It seems so far away
Though I can't touch I can't touch Your nail-scarred hands
I have a deep unspeakable joy That makes my faith to stand

Born from above You are God's only chosen One
You're the One and only true way Way to the Father's heart
You died for all sin Then You rose and now live again
Conqu'ring death and the grave So that I might live

Chorus 2

**Lord we believe in You We'll always believe in You
Though we can't see You with our eyes Deep in our hearts Your presence we find
Lord we believe in You And we'll keep our trust in You
Let the whole world say what they may No one can take this joy away
Lord we believe**

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Mighty To Save

[Lead lines on www.praisecharts.com;
Church charts on www.iwillworship.com and chords only on www.pwarchive.com]

Ben Fielding | Reuben Morgan

Chorus

**Saviour He can move the mountains
My God is mighty to save He is mighty to save
Forever Author of salvation
He rose and conquered the grave Jesus conquered the grave**

Everyone needs compassion Love that's never failing
Let mercy fall on me Everyone needs forgiveness
The kindness of a Saviour The hope of nations

So take me as You find me All my fears and failures
Fill my life again I give my life to follow
Everything I believe in Now I surrender

Ending

Shine your light And let the whole world see
We're singing for the glory Of the risen King Jesus
Shine your light And let the whole world see
We're singing for the glory Of the risen King

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[Traditional Options:]

These Things Did Thomas Count as Real LSB 472; HS 98:831; NCH 254
By All Your Saints in Warfare LSB 517 (v.6); LBW 177; LW 193

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

[NOTE: The following are contemporary song options for speaking the Apostle's Creed: *Because We Believe* ATBS 119; SPW 6; INTEGRITY 12 **OR** *This Is What I Believe* GB 249 **OR** The Apostles Creed Integrity 8 **OR** you may choose to do the thematic contemporary creed written specially for this service **OR** use the historic Apostles' Creed]

I believe.

God the Father, Creator of all things, sent His Son to be my Savior. I believe.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, entered the world as a man, born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life and died as the sacrifice for my sins. He was raised again that I might have new life. I believe.

He shows me His hands and side, the marks of His suffering, and invites me to touch Him. He reaches for me, and claims me as His own.

He is my Lord, and He is my Savior, and He is hope, and He is my all. I believe.

The Spirit of God, the holy breath of the holy God, enters my heart and creates new life. It is only through the work of the Holy Spirit, that I am able to proclaim, "My Lord and my God."

I believe. I do. I believe.

[OR...]

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen

OFFERINGS

[Anthem by Praise team, choir or soloist:]

PRAYERS¹

[Prayer Topic Starters]

- Thanks for:
 - The wonder of the resurrection.
 - The power of Your Holy Spirit, moving me to proclaim, "My Lord and my God."
 - All Your gifts to us.
 - Showing us the scars of Your suffering, and inviting us to Yourself.

- Please give us:
 - Stronger faith.
 - Courage to live as Easter people, rejoicing in the new life that is ours.

¹ Formal language and "perfectly read" prayers are not recommended for contemporary worship. People appreciate the touching sincerity of informal prayer. "Heartfelt" prayer also teaches/models simple prayer language that anyone can use at home, in the car, the office, etc. These "**Prayer Topics Starters**" are offered to help facilitate spontaneity.

- Health for those who hurt.
- Comfort for those who ache.
- Assurance for those who fret.
- Cause us by Your Holy Spirit and Your Word to:
 - Share Your love with those in need.
 - Continue to grow in our discipleship.
 - Profess our faith boldly, in every circumstance, following You as our “Lord and our God.”
- Local congregational and individual concerns

The Lord’s Prayer

[Consider having the congregation sing the Lord’s Prayer using the Malotte version using one of the lower keys such as B flat.]

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread;
 and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;
 and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
 For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

[A communion option to insert for churches celebrating the Lord’s Supper on this day]

+ The Lord’s Supper +

Here our Lord gives to us His own Body and Blood for the forgiveness of all our sins.

WE PREPARE

Pastor:

We gather around Your table Lord, for You come among us and proclaim, “Peace be to you.” You enter into our midst, and put forth your hands, still scarred, and invite us to touch You. Indeed, You reach out to touch us. You extend Your hands into our open hands, and we receive You in this sacrament. Prepare our hearts, that we might celebrate the peace You give to us.

People:

Jesus comes into our midst and invites us to receive His gifts.
 We come with hearts and hands open, trusting, in faith.
 Jesus, You are our salvation and the Light of the world.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

SHARING OF THE PEACE

Pastor: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

People: **And also with you.**

(Worshippers may turn to one another and share the peace which comes from the Lord with words such as, “God’s peace to you.”)

DISTRIBUTION SONGS – [choose as many you need]

Redeemer

[SD 22:11; SSA; Wow Worship Yellow 90]
Nicole Coleman-Mullen

Verse 1

Who taught the sun where to stand in the morning
And who told the ocean you can only come this far
And who showed the moon where to hide 'til evening
Whose words alone can catch a falling star

Chorus 1

I know my Redeemer lives I know my Redeemer lives
Let all creation testify Let this life within me cry
I know my Redeemer lives

Verse 2

The very same God who spins things in orbit
Runs to the weary the worn and the weak
And the same gentle hands That hold me when I'm broken
They conquered death to bring me victory

Bridge

He lives to take away my shame And He lives forever
I'll proclaim That the payment for my sin
Was the precious life He gave
But now He's alive And there's an empty grave

Tag

I know my Redeemer lives I know my Redeemer lives
He lives He lives He lives

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Breathe

[ATBS 2:18; WT 3:10; MSPW 2:61; SD 26:11; SSA; VS 7:53]
Marie Barnett

This is the air I breathe This is the air I breathe
Your holy presence living in me

This is my daily bread This is my daily bread
Your very word spoken to me

And I I'm desperate for You And I I'm lost without You

I'm desperate for You I'm lost without You (repeat)

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Be Unto Your Name

[HMS 14:1122; HMS 20:1568; MSPW2:102]

Gary Sadler | Lynn DeShazo

Chorus

Holy holy Lord God Almighty Worthy is the Lamb who was slain

**Highest praises honor and glory
Be unto Your name Be unto Your name**

We are a moment You are forever Lord of the ages God before time
We are a vapor You are eternal Love everlasting reigning on high

We are the broken You are the healer Jesus Redeemer mighty to save
You are the love song we'll sing forever Bowing before You blessing Your name
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[Traditional Options]:

The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord LSB 634; LW 107
This Joyful Eastertide CW 160; ELW 391; LBW 149; LSB 482; LW 140; NCH 232; RS 598; WOY 676
Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won LSB 490; LW 139; LBW 133; CW 145

COMMON DISMISSAL

Pastor: We have tasted the grace and love of God, wrapped in forms of bread and wine. May our eating and drinking fill us with the peace of Christ.

People: Amen.

BENEDICTION

Pastor:

May God the Father, Who sent His Son to be our Savior,
May God the Son, Jesus Christ, Who speaks peace to us,
May God the Holy Spirit, Who empowers us to live as resurrected people,
fill us with every gracious gift, that we might proclaim of Jesus:

People: MY LORD AND MY GOD

CLOSING SONG

Firm Foundation

[BOB 59; ATBS 1:128; HMS 9:726; MSPW 1:9]

Jamie Harvill / Nancy Gordon

Chorus

**Jesus You're my firm foundation I know I can stand secure
Jesus You're my firm foundation I put my hope in Your holy Word
I put my hope in Your holy Word**

I have a living hope (ECHO) I have a future (ECHO)
God has a plan for me (ECHO) Of this I'm sure of this I'm sure

Your Word is faithful (ECHO) Mighty in power (ECHO)
God will deliver me (ECHO) Of this I'm sure of this I'm sure

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My Glorious

[HMS 20:1602; WT 3:47; WT 5:41]

Martin Smith | Stuart Garrard

Chorus

**God is bigger than the air I breathe The world we'll leave
God will save the day And all will say
My Glorious**

The world's shaking with the love of God Great and glorious let the whole earth sing
And all you ever do is change the old for new People we believe that

Clouds are breaking heaven's come to earth Hearts awakening let the church bells ring
And all you ever do is change the old for new People we believe that

Ending

My Glorious my Glorious My Glorious my Glorious
My Glorious my Glorious My Glorious my Glorious

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Traditional Option

O Sons and Daughters of the King ELW 386; LSB 470/471; LBW 139; LW 130; CW 165; H
82 206; NCH 244; PH 116; RS 579; WC 249; UMH 317

March 2008 Worship Alive Plus Songs & Hymns

Music charts downloadable through:

www.Praisecharts.com

www.songselect.com

www.worshipkitchen.com

www.worshiptogether.com

www.Wordmusicnow.com

www.musicnotes.com

Chord charts free downloads available at:

www.Iwillworship.com

www.pwarchive.com

Mp3 downloads available through:

www.Songtouch.com

www.Worshiptogether.com

www.Walmart.com

www.Iitunes.com

New Songs to consider:

Everything Glorious

(Recorded on David Crowder's *Remedy* & Passion's *Everything Glorious*)

Lisa Gungor & Michael Gungor, © 2006 worshiptogether.com songs (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing) sixsteps Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing) [Lead lines and chord charts on www.songselect.com, www.praisecharts.com, www.pwarchive.com, and www.Iwillworship.com]

Keep watch on SongSelect & Praisecharts for the music for this amazing new song:

With One Voice (Recorded on New Life Church)

Chris Ochterbeck, © 2007 New Life Church (Admin. by New Life Church of Arkansas, Inc.)

SSS – SERMON STARTERS & SEASONINGS

The following ideas are merely intended to help get your own creative juices flowing and prepare your heart for God's Spirit to inspire and speak through you.

Theme: “Thomas: Your Twin?”

John 20:19-31

It is so easy to hear the account of the doubting Thomas and criticize him for not believing when He had the risen Christ right in front of him! After all, we wouldn't doubt like that had we been there and saw the Savior in plain sight. Or would we? Is Thomas maybe your twin brother? Many times the Lord calls us to faith yet we plead for a “sign”. This morning we take a close look at Jesus response and call to faith for not only Thomas but for each of us!

Theological Reflections and Practical Applications

20:19, 20 Jesus came and stood in the midst: Christ's appearance was miraculous, because the doors were shut. Jesus, as God, could perform a variety of miracles without requiring a change in His humanity. Here Christ's body was a physical body, the same body in which He died and was buried. The difference is that His flesh had been changed to take on immortality and incorruptibility (1 Cor. 15:53).

20:21 As indicates that the disciples were commissioned to carry on Christ's work, not to begin a new one.

20:22 Receive the Holy Spirit: The ministry to which Jesus called the disciples (v. 21; see also Matt. 28:16–20; Luke 24:47–49) required spiritual power. The reference here is to a special preparation of the apostles who were to become the foundation of the church at Pentecost. Here Jesus breathed the Spirit into the disciples. At Pentecost the Spirit unified the believers into one body and empowered them to testify of Jesus (1 Cor. 12:13). The reception of the Spirit here is reminiscent of the creative breath of God into Adam in Gen. 2:7. Yet the gift here was not a human spirit, but the Spirit of the living God.

20:23 If you forgive: The apostles did not take Jesus' words to mean that they had the power to forgive sins (Acts 8:22). They knew that only God could forgive sins (Mark 2:7). Neither the apostles nor the church had the power to forgive specific sins or to prevent forgiveness for any individual. Fundamentally, Jesus was speaking of the responsibility of the church to declare the gospel to all the world, so that those who believe in Jesus can find the precious gift of forgiveness (Matt. 16:19).

20:24, 25 Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples in the closed room (vv. 19–23). Unless I see in His hands: When Jesus appeared to the other disciples, He showed them His hands and His side (v. 20). No doubt they told Thomas about it; hence his request.

20:26, 27 In spite of his misgivings (v. 25), Thomas was with them. He had not left the group, nor had they excluded him (Rom 14:1).

20:28 My Lord and my God: In awestruck wonder, Thomas not only believed that Christ was risen from the dead, but he also saw that the Resurrection proved His deity.

20:29 Those who have not seen includes all who have believed in Christ since His ascension to the Father (1 Pet. 1:8, 9).

20:30, 31 John states the purpose of his book. His purpose was to convince his readers that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah who fulfilled God's promises to Israel. Jesus is the Son of God, God in the flesh. By believing these things, a person obtains eternal life (1:12).²

²Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999, S. Jn 20:24-31

Lord over Doubt

Have you ever struggled with doubts or troubling questions about Christ, the Christian faith, or the church? Do you sometimes feel that tough questions are not welcome or acceptable among believers?

Thomas (John 20:24) was a classic skeptic. Even though he had traveled with Jesus and learned from His teaching for at least three years, he needed time, evidence, and personal convincing before he would accept the Resurrection (20:25, 26). But Jesus responded to his doubt by inviting him to check it all out. He presented Himself for Thomas's inspection (15:26, 27) and did not chide him for wanting to be certain.

Jesus seeks to honor the mind and heart of every seeker or doubter. He knows that easily developed loyalties often lack staying power. By contrast, many tenacious people who probe the corners of their doubts and fears finally reach the truth—and faith in the truth is what Christ desires. He even promised that the Spirit would aid those who seek it (16:12–16).

Outline Possibilities

Conquering Doubt

I. Doubt Causes

A. Culture

- we live in a culture that does not believe – there are “scoffers”

B. Circumstances

- painful things in life cause doubt – how can God allow such suffering?

C. Convenience

- the real issue – people choose not to believe because they want to continue to live in the way of their own choosing.

II. Doubt Cures

A. Acknowledge doubt

- doubt is not to be feared – it's part of the journey of faith

B. Understand doubt

- doubt is simply doubt – another opinion, with no more nor less credibility than we allow

C. Cling to the faith you have

- it's not the size of our faith, it's Who we put it in.

D. Experience the touch of Jesus

- Jesus invited Thomas to touch His scars. He invites us as well (it's called Communion)

Quotations

Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt.

John Henry Newman

“When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’

Note what motivated John's question. It was not just the dungeon or even death. It was the problem of unmet expectations—the fact that John was in deep trouble and Jesus was conducting business as usual.

Is this what messiahs do when trouble comes? Is this what God does when his followers are in a bind? Jesus' silence was enough to chisel a leak into the dam of John's belief. “Are you the one? Or have I been following the wrong Lord?”

Had the Bible been written by a public relations agency, they would have eliminated that verse. It's not good PR strategy to admit that one of the cabinet members has doubts about the president. You don't let stories like that get out if you are trying to present a unified front.

But the Scriptures weren't written by personality agents; they were inspired by an eternal God who knew that every disciple from then on would spend time in the dungeon of doubt.

Though the circumstances have changed, the questions haven't.

They are asked anytime the faithful suffer the consequences of the faithless. Anytime a person takes a step in the right direction, only to have her feet knocked out from under her, anytime a person does a good deed but suffers evil results, anytime a person takes a stand, only to end up flat on his face ... the questions fall like rain:

“If God is so good, why do I hurt so bad?”

“If God is really there, why am I here?”

“What did I do to deserve this?”

“Did God slip up this time?”

“Why are the righteous persecuted?”

In his book *Disappointment with God*, Philip Yancey quotes a letter that articulates the problem of unmet expectations in all its excruciating reality. Meg Woodson lost two children to cystic fibrosis, and her daughter’s death at age twenty-three was particularly traumatic. The following words speak of her pain and doubt as she struggled to cope with what happened:

I was sitting beside her bed a few days before her death when suddenly she began screaming. I will never forget those shrill, piercing, primal screams It’s against this background of human beings falling apart ... that God, who could have helped, looked down on a young woman devoted to Him, quite willing to die for Him to give Him glory, and decided to sit on His hands and let her death top the horror charts for cystic fibrosis deaths. Does God sometimes sit on his hands? Does God sometimes choose to do nothing? Does God sometimes opt for silence even when I’m screaming my loudest? Some time ago, I took my family to the bicycle store to purchase a bike for five-year-old Jenna. She picked out a shiny “Starlett” with a banana seat and training wheels. And Andrea, age three, decided she wanted one as well.

I explained to Andrea that she was too young. I told her she was still having trouble with a tricycle and was too small for a two-wheeler. No luck; she still wanted a bike. I explained to her that when she was a bit older, she would get a bike, too. She just stared at me. I tried to tell her that a big bike would bring her more pain than pleasure, more scrapes than thrills. She turned her head and said nothing.

Finally I sighed and said this time her daddy knew best. Her response? She screamed it loud enough for everyone in the store to hear:

“Then I want a *new* daddy!”

Though the words were from a child’s mouth, they carried an adult’s sentiments.

Disappointment demands a change in command. When we don’t agree with the One who calls the shots, our reaction is often the same as Andrea’s—the same as John’s. “Is he the right one for this job?” Or, as John put it, “Are you the one? Should we look for another?”

Andrea, with her three-year-old reasoning powers, couldn’t believe that a new bike would be anything less than ideal for her. From her vantage point, it would be the source of eternal bliss. And from her vantage point, the one who could grant that bliss was “sitting on his hands.”

John couldn’t believe that anything less than his release would be for the best interest of all involved. In his opinion, it was time to exercise some justice and get some action. But the One who had the power was “sitting on his hands.”

I can’t believe that God would sit in silence while a missionary is kicked out of a foreign country or a Christian loses a promotion because of his beliefs or a faithful wife is abused by an unbelieving husband. These are just three of many items that have made their way onto my prayer list—all prayers that seem to have gone unanswered.

Rule of thumb: Clouds of doubt are created when the warm, moist air of our expectations meets the cold air of God’s silence.

If you’ve heard the silence of God, if you’ve been left standing in the dungeon of doubt, then don’t put this book down until you read the next chapter. You may learn, as John did, that the problem is not as much in God’s silence as it is in your ability to hear.³

There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds.

Alfred Lord Tennyson

A faith which does not doubt is a dead faith.

Miguel De Unamuno

³Lucado, Max: *The Applause of Heaven*. Dallas [Tex. : Word Pub., 1996, S. 167

I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath--these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely--these are my native air. A John Hopkins University doctor says, "We do not know why it is that worriers die sooner than the non-worriers, but that is a fact." But I, who am simple of mind, think I know; We are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue, brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way. To live by worry is to live against reality.

Dr. E. Stanley Jones.

If faith never encounters doubt, if truth never struggles with error, if good never battles with evil, how can faith know its own power. In my own pilgrimage, if I have to choose between a faith that has stared doubt in the eye and made it blink, or a naïve faith that has never known the firing line of doubt, I will choose the former every time.

Gary Parker as quoted by Lee Strobel, The Case for Faith

"Doubt is the skeleton in the closet of faith and I know no better way to treat a skeleton than to bring it into the open and expose it for what it is: not something to hide or fear, but a hard structure on which living tissue may grow."

Philip Yancey, Reaching for the Invisible God

Thomas came with doubts. Did Christ turn him away?

Moses had his reservations. Did God tell him to go home?

Job had his struggles. Did God avoid him?

Paul had his hard times. Did God abandon him?

No. God never turns away the sincere heart. Tough questions don't stump God. He invites our probing. Mark it down. God never turns away the honest seeker. Go to God with your questions. You may not find all the answers, but in finding God, you know the One who does.⁴

Illustrations

Leap of Faith

Faith is like a trapeze. We walk by faith, not sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We learn three things: 1) It takes a leap of faith to let go of one bar and reach for the other one. 2) It can be scary letting go to your security and trusting. 3) You don't have forever to decide to let go and grab the other bar. But one thing that helps us step out in faith is that we know Jesus is our safety net. He will always catch us! Dr. Jack Cotrell says, "We all have to take a leap of faith but it is not a very long leap because we have such good evidence."

Kim Huffman, Sermoncentral.com

I Doubt It

Remember the slinky? That delightful spring-like contraption that moved magically down the stairs. Did you ever try to get your slinky to go down the stairs? Mine didn't work. It would make three or four stairs and then I'd have to restart the process. Did you ever wonder why Slinkys worked on the commercials but not when you brought one home? The commercials used slightly smaller stairs, narrower than the average stair. It's no wonder we become skeptical. Even the slinky commercial is rigged.

Maxwell A. Quinn

⁴Lucado, Max ; Gibbs, Terri A.: *God's Inspirational Promises*. Nashville, TN : J. Countryman, 2001, 1996, S. 69

Choosing To Believe – Or Choosing what to Believe

A pastor I know, Stephey Bilynskyj, starts each confirmation class with a jar full of beans. He asks his students to guess how many beans are in the jar, and on a big pad of paper writes down their estimates. Then, next to those estimates, he helps them make another list: Their favorite songs. When the lists are complete, he reveals the actual number of beans in the jar. The whole class looks over their guesses, to see which estimate was closest to being right. Bilynskyj then turns to the list of favorite songs. "And which one of these is closest to being right?" he asks. The students protest that there is no "right answer"; a person's favorite song is purely a matter of taste. Bilynskyj, who holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from Notre Dame asks, "When you decide what to believe in terms of your faith, is that more like guessing the number of beans, or more like choosing your favorite song?" Always, Bilynskyj says, from old as well as young, he gets the same answer: Choosing one's faith is more like choosing a favorite song. When Bilynskyj told me this, it took my breath away. "After they say that, do you confirm them?" I asked him. "Well," smiled Bilynskyj, "First I try to argue them out of it."

Tim Stafford, Christianity Today

Faith in Time

A story from the life of missionaries Robert and Mary Moffat illustrates this truth. For 10 years this couple labored faithfully in Bechuanaland (now called Botswana) without one ray of encouragement to brighten their way. They could not report a single convert. Finally the directors of their mission board began to question the wisdom of continuing the work. The thought of leaving their post, however, brought great grief to this devoted couple, for they felt sure that God was in their labors, and that they would see people turn to Christ in due season. They stayed; and for a year or two longer, darkness reigned. Then one day a friend in England sent word to the Moffats that she wanted to mail them a gift and asked what they would like. Trusting that in time the Lord would bless their work, Mrs. Moffat replied, "Send us a communion set; I am sure it will soon be needed." God honored that dear woman's faith. The Holy Spirit moved upon the hearts of the villagers, and soon a little group of six converts was united to form the first Christian church in that land. The communion set from England was delayed in the mail; but on the very day before the first commemoration of the Lord's supper in Bechuanaland, the set arrived.

Paul Fritz, Sermoncentral.com

On the Lighter Side ☺

Reasonable Doubt

A defendant was on trial for murder in Oklahoma. There was strong evidence indicating guilt, but there was no corpse. In the defense's closing statement the lawyer, knowing that his client would probably be convicted, resorted to a trick. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I have a surprise for you all," the lawyer said as he looked at his watch. "Within one minute, the person presumed dead in this case will walk into this courtroom." He looked toward the courtroom door. The jurors, somewhat stunned, all looked on eagerly. A minute passed. Nothing happened. Finally the lawyer said, "Actually, I made up the previous statement. But you all looked on with anticipation. I, therefore, put it to you that there is reasonable doubt in this case as to whether anyone was killed and insist that you return a verdict of not guilty." The jury, clearly confused, retired to deliberate. A few minutes later, the jury returned and pronounced a verdict of guilty. "But how?" inquired the lawyer. "You must have had some doubt; I saw all of you stare at the door." Answered the jury foreman: "Oh, we did look. But your client didn't."

Charles Cockroft, Sermoncentral.com

I Doubt It

In May 1996, Quebec legislator Andre Boulerice denounced voter fraud during a committee meeting, citing one particular example of bogus names registered to vote in Old Montreal. "I know there are famous people in my [district]," said Boulerice, "but I doubt 'Omar Sharif' would be voting [here]," especially since, according to voter records, he shares an apartment with "Martina Navratilova." The next

day, neighbors of the couple reported Sharif, son of the actor, is indeed married to a woman named Martina Navratilova, who is a stockbroker.

News of the Weird

Video Resources

Doubting Thomas [Gospel Introduction OR Post-Service Theme Reprise]

An interesting video. The first half of the video is simply a graphic depiction of the Gospel lesson in which Thomas ultimately proclaims, "My Lord and my God." The remainder of the video is a series of nature scenes designed to demonstrate the existence of God. This video is available as a download from www.sermonspice.com. Simply type in the name of the video in the search bar. The video costs \$15 and runs 2:00. This video is most effectively used as a lead-in to the Gospel, or as post-service reminder of the call to believe.

Proof [Introduction to Gospel, Lead-In to Sermon, Insertion in Sermon OR Post-Service Theme Reprise]

A very inspirational video that encourages the viewer to look the results of an action to find the proof, for instance, a shadow proves the sunshine. People have difficulty believing what they have not seen, but they do not see because they are not looking. The video climaxes with the cross. This video is available as a download from www.sermonspice.com. Simply type the name of the video in the search bar. This video costs \$15 and runs 2:16. It can be used as an introduction to the Gospel, as a lead-in to the sermon, as an insertion in the sermon, but is perhaps most effective as a post-service reminder of the message.