

Jesus and Thomas

Key Verse: *“Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.”*
—John 20:27

Selected Scripture:
John 20:24-29

Thomas the Apostle is often labeled “Doubting Thomas.” However, today’s lesson presents a disciple in the process of spiritual growth. Thomas had missed Jesus’ first appearance to the other disciples. (John 20:24) When the others testified, “We have seen the Lord,” Thomas sought proof before he could accept the account of his brethren. (vs. 25) He wanted to see for himself the nail marks and touch the wounds. That may sound harsh, but it is also human. After

grief, one may often fear being misled by renewed hope. Thomas was not willing to blindly accept the statement that Jesus had been resurrected. He wanted a firsthand encounter as the others had experienced.—vss. 19,20

Eight days later the disciples were inside again, with the doors shut. (vs. 26) Jesus’ resurrection had not instantly erased their fear. Still, Jesus came and said, “Peace be unto you.” These tender words from the Master would become a common greeting in the New Testament epistles of John, Peter, and Paul, to the Early Church. Before addressing Thomas, Jesus eased the room’s anxiety while teaching a valuable lesson. Faith is not pretending we are unafraid; it is trusting the risen Christ, who enters the door of our hearts.

Jesus then turned to Thomas and stated again the words of our Key Verse. “Reach hither thy finger, ... reach hither thy hand,” echoing Thomas own criteria for belief. (vs. 27) Thomas was not alone in at first doubting that Jesus had been resurrected. On the day of Jesus’ resurrection, all the disciples were doubters. They did not believe the report of the women.—Luke 24:11

Luke’s Gospel provides this further account: “Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?”—vss. 36-41

Jesus’ message to all the disciples and to us is the same as he gave to Thomas: “Be not faithless, but believing.” (John 20:27) Doubt can result in confusion and pain, but here the question was allegiance. Would Thomas entrust himself to Jesus or continue to hold back? Faith is not the absence of questions; it is, rather, placing our lives in Jesus’ hands as we seek answers.

Thomas did not hold back but responded with a climactic confession to the resurrected Jesus: “My Lord and my God.” (vs. 28). Here Thomas not only admitted to Jesus’ resurrection, but also recognized his Master as Lord. Jesus concludes our lesson with these profound words, addressed to every generation since: “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” (vs. 29) We can never touch the wounds of Jesus. Let us, however, exercise faith and trust in the apostolic witness, the Holy Spirit’s influence, and the risen Lord’s work of developing the body of Christ. ■