

Quasimodo Geniti, AD 2008

John 20:19-31 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld." ²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, 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 in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." ²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although 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, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Poor Thomas. He's the only disciple who gets remembered with an insulting epithet.

Peter seems far more deserving of a title. Peter, who denied even knowing Jesus, whom Jesus rebuked by calling him Satan, whose fragile faith caused him to sink in the Sea of Galilee, has no such nickname. But Thomas will always be Doubting Thomas. He heard the report of the other ten disciples, who told him they had seen the resurrected Lord. But Thomas needed more than mere words; he needed something he could stick his finger into.

2 "These things did Thomas count as real: the warmth of blood, the chill of steel, the grain of wood, the heft of stone, the last frail twitch of flesh and bone." He had seen—with his own eyes—the warm, red blood pouring from the dying Savior. He watched cold steel nails hammered into his hands and feet. He saw the splintery wood and heard it scrape the shredded flesh of the Son of God. He witnessed the last frail twitch before Jesus cried out with a loud gasp and breathed His last. And Thomas watched the grave sealed with the immovable stone. These things were real; he knew it. Jesus really died. And Thomas was no fool. Death is as real as it gets. So how could One who died afterward be alive? "Unless I see in his hands

the marks of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

3 Thomas was a full-fledged skeptic. “The vision of his skeptic mind was keen enough to make him blind to any unexpected act too large for his small world of fact.” He was bull-headed, stubborn, resistant to believe anything contrary to common sense. For Thomas, seeing was believing. But the problem is believing is not seeing. The writer of Hebrews says “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Faith is not in what can be seen. Your eyes see the mundane, everyday things around you, wiping noses, filing paperwork, cooking dinner. Your eyes see reports of school shootings, meth busts, and endless wars. Your eyes see frail hands, tender joints, and implacable diseases. Those things do you count as real, real proof that God is not on your side. But seeing is doubting, not believing.

4 So repent. Repent of expecting God to conform to your standards. Repent of expecting constant proof of the Lord’s provision for you. Repent of supposing that faith is something you can arrive at logically. Repent of believing your eyes more than your ears.

5 The Lord didn’t leave Thomas in his doubting. He didn’t leave His disciples in their fearing. Jesus came to them, despite their fear, despite the locked door. He came on the eve of His resurrection and showed them His hands and his side. And He spoke peace to them with the forgiveness of sins. And again He appeared the following Sunday, this time to Thomas, too. “His reasoned certainties denied that one could live when one had died, until his fingers read like Braille the markings of the spear and nail.” Thomas’ doubt is good news for you. St. Gregory said of Thomas, “The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of any of the other disciples.”

6 Faith is in the unseen. Faith is believing that God is where He seems not to be. Even in the midst of the mundane, even in times of abandonment and stress, even in stories of violence and loneliness, even on the cross God is there. There on the cross, God was where He seemed not to be. Jesus is the divine Son of God, the Sinless One sentenced to die for the sin

of humanity. He called Thomas out of his unbelief into belief because the Lord had already died as payment for Thomas' unbelief. He calls you out of unbelief, out of doubting, out of skepticism, because He has died for your doubt as well. Faith is not the product of what you can see. Faith is a gift because you cannot do it. "Faith comes by hearing," says St. Paul. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe," Jesus said.

7 That's why St. Gregory thanks God for Thomas' doubt. Even in spite of his doubt, Jesus appeared to Thomas. He bid Thomas poke his rude finger into the nail scars and shove his offensive hand into the spear wound. Even Thomas's doubting eyes beheld the Lord. Thomas believed and confessed, "My Lord and my God!" He does the same for you. He takes your doubts, your fears, your insecurities and makes them His own. And He takes His faith, His hope, His trust in His Heavenly Father and gives these to you.

8 So may you with Thomas count these things as real: the cool water through which the Lord has declared you to be His beloved child, the body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins in tasteless wafer and sweet wine. You may count as real the forgiveness that the Lord wanted to resound in your ears. So that you might hear Christ's very words of forgiveness, He sent his ministers, breathing on them the Holy Spirit and giving them a command: forgive sins or withhold forgiveness. You may count these things as real means through which God demonstrates His unending mercy: words, water, wafer, wine. Do not disbelieve, but believe!

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Pastor Jeff Hemmer

This sermon is in debt to Chad Bird for ideas and expressions contained therein.