

W Thomas - Sermon - The Second Sunday of Easter - St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Kinston NC - April 27, 2025

O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for God invites us to live and love like Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit, help others to do the same.

On this, the Second Sunday of Easter, my opening statement, which is a statement of discipleship, for me is all the more important, because it lends itself to this particular day, which begins with confusion. Wasn't Easter last week? Isn't the Sunday that follows the first Sunday? No, the First Sunday of Easter was Easter.

So that's our first math problem that we're dealing with today. There'll be a second math problem in just a moment, and that will come in here in just a second. But let me tell you what the sermon is going to be.

This helps keep me focused. *This sermon considers how our joy in proclaiming, Alleluia, Christ is risen, the Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia, is deepened when we hear Thomas' statement of faith, my Lord and my God.*

Now we need to get to that point by maybe dispensing or putting in proper perspective why this day has so much going on in it.

Now first of all, you're here. Thank you for being here. You, sometimes, if you are as disciplined as you are, where you keep showing up, especially on this, the Second Sunday of Easter, the one following the big event last week when the pews were full, and even this room, come on, you have more people here, maybe double the number that were here. Maybe somebody was actually sitting in the seat you like to sit in, okay?

So you think about, it was a big and festive, wonderful, all kinds, and so that begs a type of sermon that follows the next week. It's the priest going "where is everybody who was here last week sermon!" Okay, and you know that one, all right? And then you get to hear the sermon that they're hearing, and you're going, wait a minute, I am here. Why am I being yelled at for the people who are not here? What kind of sermon is that? So we're not doing that one. So we'll just put that one in its perspective.

And then there's the other sermon. The other sermon is, I'm going to do my physical gesture now. *Oh, that Thomas. Why couldn't he believe?* All right, well, we're

the 2,000-year inheritors of Jesus's resurrection, you know? It's a little easier for us, because we've been showing up every week saying, hey, he rose from the dead. So we have some of that.

But oh, and did you notice that my last name is Thomas? I have a rational, a relative connection to this whole doubting Thomas, stop it thing. So maybe I'm putting some of my own energy in this as well. Remember, the word believe means to set your heart on something.

How many married folk do we have in here? And how long ago were you married? And on that day, you set your heart on somebody. You didn't know what you were getting into, better for worse, richer for poorer, sickness and in health. And you believed it would work out.

My wife, Edna Marie, and I celebrated our 51st wedding anniversary last October. We had to do the work through the years. I understand what it means to say you believe when you set your heart on something. Which is another reason, by the way, thank you for being here today in the place to receive your nourishment for that which you set your heart on.

So now, having dispensed with those types of sermons, let's take a look again at who Thomas is. Remember, when Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem, where he is clearly saying to everybody, I'm on my way to die, who's the first one that says, I'll go with you, Lord? Happens to be Thomas. Okay, Thomas is not a scaredy cat.

Thomas knows what's going on here. I think this is a plausible explanation for how we enter into the second math question. The second math question is, there weren't 12 disciples in the upper room.

Why? You're missing Thomas. You take one away. And who else are you missing? Judas. Okay, so that's the second math question. That's where we stand. Who else? We don't know if women are up there. Whoever is up there, we leave that alone.

We also have to remember that this is a Johannine construct, this particular story, that we get to hear every year after Easter, always this passage of scripture in our lectionary. I think it's really important because of that.

And part of what is going on, why we have this, the Johannine community, is the one that has been kicked out of the synagogues, kicked out of everything. So, you have to realize, they've kind of got their dander up a little bit. We're

beginning to establish our identity. And so, we've got to have some strength about, whoa, what's going on?

We need a statement of faith that speaks to our own human, here's your vocabulary word of the day, vicissitude, where we're possibly warbling and moving away. That's why Thomas becomes an incredibly poor character. But it's the other ten that I think, you all who are here right now, are so much alike.

There's an expression, we are diminished by your absence. You know how you have friends and they don't show up for coffee or a party or whatever and you wonder, where are they? They were so enlightening and enriching of the group. You just think about that. It's a great expression to say to somebody, you weren't in church on Sunday. Are you okay? Which is another way of saying, we were stronger, we were better when you were there. How can we help you come back? Can we do something? What's going on?

I think the ten understood Thomas.

There are people who need to grieve alone. I think, this is my own thing now, maybe Thomas was one of those, the reason why he wasn't there on the first day, he was out grieving alone out of the depth of his love in Jesus and wondering how his world could be shattered. That's reasonable.

But I think one of the other miracles of the day is the fact that you now have the other ten finding a way to bring Thomas back. Not going to him, well why weren't you there when Jesus showed up? It was so way cool. It was, we really needed to have you there.

Can you please come back? You doing okay now, buddy? What's going on? You can see some of that in terms of how a good human interaction of folks who have been close to one another. And they brought him back. So that he could come and give us a gift. The clearest statement of faith of who Jesus is, is when Jesus invites Thomas to say something publicly.

I don't see him ridiculing him, but show the marks on my hands a little bit. I see him saying, hey, what you see is what you get. And Thomas doesn't touch anything.

If you listen carefully to the scripture, read it closely. He responds and drops down on his knee, which is not in scripture, but I can't imagine him not doing anything else but. I mean, I would.

And he goes, *my Lord and my God*: the statement of faith that the Johannine community needed to hear to then go forward and move us, the Jesus movement, to being who we are now. We need that statement of faith. Who is our Lord and our God? My Lord and my God: Jesus Christ.

I'm going to leave you with an image. When I'm developing my approach to what scripture means to me on a Sunday, I play with graphics so I can create what it looks like on my website. This is an introductory thing.

And sometimes that gives me insight into what's going on. And I realize...have you, anybody here like to do puzzles? You know, like 1,000 piece puzzles, 500 piece puzzles? I have a wife, Edna Marie, who loves to do puzzles. And I also know what it's like when she's getting crazy looking for the last piece.

It's usually fallen somewhere on the floor, or you can't find her, putting the whole thing together. What is it to find that last piece and bring the puzzle to completion? What makes it complete? I would present to you this thought. When the ten found Thomas and brought him back, he became the piece in the puzzle that made the statement of faith that he proclaimed, the expression of what they all believed, what all became complete, what completes all of us.

And what this day gives us is a sense of what we celebrated last week. It reminds us of the good work we're called to do this week and the weeks beyond to bring others the invitation, others to live in love like Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, help others to do the same. We're all part of that big puzzle.

And it's nice to know that Jesus is the one helping us fill it in.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

All these words I offer in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.