

W Thomas – The Third Sunday of Easter - Christ

Episcopal Church, Elizabeth City NC – May 4, 2025

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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.

I have a custom that helps me stay honest to the approach I have in preaching, which is to spend the week in prayer and reflection with the scriptures and graphical images that I create for the computer that help show off what I'm doing but sometimes draw me in more clearly to what's going on, and then write a statement that will guide me that I am now going to share with you, and hopefully where the Lord leads me with the words that come from my mouth, we'll stay in keeping both with that and my promise to get you to breakfast before the Baptists, so we'll leave it at that.

This sermon considers how the guiding values found in the expression, we belong to one another, together with God's help, we can make one another stronger, informs how we, the least likely people, are called to do God's work. Within the scriptures that we heard today, and if you recall the scripture that you might have heard if you had been here last week, which is a scripture that we hear every year on the Sunday following Easter, the second Sunday of Easter of Thomas not being there when Jesus appears the second time to the disciples in the gospel according to John in the upper room, but the ten were there in the beginning, hold on to that thought, hold on to the character again we have of Simon Peter, whose very essence of his faith journey unfolds again in the scripture of gospel according to John, and then of course Ananias, one from the Acts of the Apostles, not the idea of Ananias, one of the Hebrew leaders, but Ananias, a person of the way that God tapped on and said, minister to Saul who will become Paul, and when you hear the tensions in all of those particular scriptures, you begin to see the notion of what it might mean to say God uses the least likely people, and please hold on to the thought that the least likely people are all of us, including very much me, no matter how nicely dressed I am, I have to remember that I am a least likely person given what I know I can do to easily turn away from God because of the depth of my own humanity and how much I have to do in my own prayer life to be staying open and listening carefully to all of God's holy invitations. So in that regard, I want you to know that I am speaking to me more than perhaps even to you.

Whenever I preach, it's an internal dialogue where you guys get to listen in on what's going on between God and me, and hopefully it's useful beyond just my

own thoughts floating around in my head. We belong to one another, together with God's help, we can make one another stronger. A simple statement that connects us to the baptismal covenant and reminds us of a guiding value, the sense of the ones found there, and you can think of the other ones that help you make the right decisions as you listen carefully to God.

Now in the case of Ananias, and we'll start with him, Ananias knows clearly who the enemy is. Saul is going to come and wreak havoc, and you want me to do what? I just love the fact that he finally hears and accepts God's holy invitation to live in love like Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to share that love. It's not really recorded so much by Paul in any of his own writings, or any place else, but if you've met somebody the very first time who has something that you want, and it's somebody who happens to be a Christian, and you discover that they've got something that unlocks the brightness, the luminous nature of what Jesus offered Peter, James and John, and the transfiguration, the fullness of all of God's love that is presented to us in Jesus Christ, and you say, I'd like that, and you begin to say, maybe I should emulate some of how that person lives their lives, and maybe if I'm fortunate, I'll learn a little bit about how they struggled to learn that life, because then I'll be connected directly to them, and they're my pathway, and my pathway to somebody else, to meet the love of Jesus Christ.

Just don't forget, when they're having their meal on the beach, Jesus is going through the same actions that we go through in communion. He gives thanks, he blesses, and he shares. Did you notice it was bread and fish again? You know, how many times are we going to use the same menu? But it still works, like the feeding of the 5,000, and it's in that moment that it's becoming clearer, where we get our nourishment.

It's not just from the bread, or the wine, or the connection, it's how Jesus is fully present for us, and we have Peter in this particular moment. Peter is still struggling. What do you think Peter is struggling with? Because he guessed wrong about where the fishing spot was? I suspect that Peter, if he's a lot like me, Peter is saying, you know, I think I remember denying Jesus three times.

That was pretty profound, and yet he still loves me. When we met him in the upper room, he still loved me, he still loves me, but he, and then by Jesus's action, what does Jesus do for Peter? Peter gets it directly. He gets asked, not once, not twice, why three times? There's a reason for it, I think.

Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Feed my lambs, feed my sheep, feed my... Go off, you will have everything you need, and be careful, because you know what's going to happen. And when I say in my open, we

belong to one another, together with God's help, we can make one another stronger. I give you the touchstone again of the ten finding a way after they were on a mountaintop experience, having met Jesus in the upper room, finding the missing Thomas.

One of my personal contentions, did you notice my last name is Thomas? So I've been dealing with the doubting Thomas thing like as a joke forever. I'm not sure, I think Thomas was grieving. Thomas had to go grieve by himself, and the real miracle was that they, the ten, found a way for Thomas to come back and give us a great gift.

The gift of an incredible, most pertinent, most appropriate, perhaps the deepest statement of faith ever, my Lord and my God. We're beginning our relationship together, you and I. My hope is that you will be comfortable enough to give me insights into your own faith journeys, so that I can find my touchstone with you. And I know deeply in my heart of hearts that touchstone will be the love of God that we have found in Jesus Christ, when we have become the least likely person to do God's work, and discovered every gift we needed was presented to us, and somehow we made the kingdom of God, heaven on earth, known.

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

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